



Isabel Maria Castelhana Técnicas Realistas nas Obras Autobiográficas
Claro de Almeida de Sindiwe Magona



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

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Acknowledgements

My supervisor, David Callahan, for his support, understanding, enthusiasm and faith in me.

This work is dedicated to:

- My baby daughter, Marta, who brought a new meaning to my life;
- My parents, Aníbal and Lurdes, who taught me everything I know, especially the meaning of 'effort'. Thank you for having so much faith in me;
- My husband, Vítor: you were always there in the good and bad moments. Thank you for all your help, reliance, enthusiasm and understanding;
- My siblings Ricardo (Tázinho) and Cláudia. Thanks for the support, confidence and for not letting me lose strength;
- All my friends especially Sofia Biscaia who had the patience to listen to me, kept the faith alive along with the useful suggestions; Paula McGill and Teresa Rocha (Tê): the distance was shortened by all of those "you can do it" phone calls;
- Finally to my family who were always available to take care of Marta;

To all of you in deep gratitude.

resumo

Nos últimos anos temos assistido ao reavivar do realismo, no entanto, este tem sido hifenizado com tantos outros termos que assumiu um significado ambíguo. Tentarei, ao longo deste trabalho, classificar o termo realismo e mostrar as suas técnicas adaptadas à autobiografia. Nas obras autobiográficas de Sindiwe Magona *To My Children's Children* e *Forced to Grow* obtemos um relato verídico do que foi, para uma mulher negra, crescer e viver na África do Sul. Estes trabalhos autobiográficos irão ser analisados à luz da perspectiva realista tendo em conta as características próprias da autobiografia.

abstract

In the last few years Realism has been revived assuming almost an 'elastic' meaning and has been hyphenated with many words. I intend to clarify the meaning of Realism and how its techniques will appear in autobiographies. In the autobiographical works by Sindiwe Magona *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* we will get a faithful account of what it was for a black woman to grow up and live in South Africa. These autobiographical works will be analysed through a Realist perspective albeit with attention to the characteristics of autobiographical writing as well.

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INTRODUCTION

Confronting postcolonial studies for the first time, I imaginatively contemplated a vast, virtually virgin textual territory, its germination only coming about five decades ago. However, to discuss African literature poses certain problems for a European as he/she is involved in political, ethnic and cultural questions never entirely understood. Furthermore, positioning oneself as a critic, she/he needs to change the way that has hitherto been used to perceive things, that is, from a Eurocentric–universalist perspective. The Western reader has tended to adopt a superior, even arrogant attitude, sustaining it through putatively unquestionable historical support. The European could only discern, until recently, two parties involved in any cultural or civilisational matters: her/his own and the Other, this latter being everyone else, an abstract amorphous entity with no correspondence in the real world. As Tsenay Serequeberhan says:

On one hand, you have the colonizer, on the other the colonized. These two groups – one of human beings in the process of extending and globalizing their cultural and historical actuality and the other of thingified entities frozen in time and degraded beyond belief – exist an organic whole in subordination. The colonizer and the colonized each constitute the Other for one another and determine themselves in terms of the other.¹

This is the Western perspective when considering the so-called *Dark Continent*: there is an almost overwhelming strangeness, not only on the material level but mostly at the political and ideological one (consider the district commissioner's patronising attitude towards Okonkwo's suicide and people's reaction to it and his intention to write a book about what he thought the Nigerians were: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe).

Due to the lack of cognisance of this Other, there is a reluctance to take the other side, leaving behind the security of long familiar ground. This has been the most acute difficulty I have encountered. It is true that the times have changed and the new directions taken are leading to a greater degree of mutual understanding and humility when commenting on the Other, but it is also vital not to abandon a critical perspective in order not to fall into the error of indulgence. Still, I could not help questioning myself and the legitimacy I had as a white Western female who has just recently become aware of distinguished African cultures, with their right place as contributors to the make-up of humanity, to discuss African works where reality, symbolism and metaphor mingle in an artistically knitted net, often too different for me to understand confidently. Nevertheless, I fell in love with this area and I have decided to examine 'The Realist strategies in Sindiwe Magona's autobiographical works', namely *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*. Realism has been a very important tendency but unfortunately it has assumed almost elastic dimensions, as it seems to provide some kind of semantic support for many words. It is easy to come across words such as, to name a few, Critical Realism, Ideal Realism, Ironical Realism, Naïve Realism, Poetic Realism, Feminist Realism, Magic Realism and many others.

But what is Realism? We cannot say, as there are many characteristics that define Realism but none of them, alone, is able to define it. Truth-telling is at the centre of beliefs about Realism along with a certain directness, sincerity, simplicity and unadorned style. It is here, in this elementary sentence, that problems arise. This thirst for the truth of life wishes to include the commonplace, the everyday and essentially the ordinary lives of humble people, which in itself brings many problems as it is hard to choose the appropriate words while escaping from banal and vulgar sentences. Things like "getting in or out of the house" or "trying on one's shoes" were at the core of many of the authors' difficulties.

Another dilemma was the choice of facts to include, as the very act of choosing is subjective, undermining a possible value-free Realism. Moreover, underneath the aura of simplicity of the realist writers there are often many writings and rewritings of the same sentence. Many authors claimed that ‘everything is true’, that they were showing ‘the truth and nothing but the truth’ but they also realised that this mission of telling the truth about ordinary people’s lives was very difficult to achieve and perhaps hardly possible, which took them to another stage in the history of Realism. In this new stage, around 1888, they believe that only the ‘illusion of life’ would be able to be captured by Realism. Therefore the notion of verisimilitude, which is the quality of appearing to be true, plausible, lifelike and the ‘effect of reality’ became their central aim. Throughout this work we will analyse some of these Realistic characteristics along with their inner contradictions. Moreover Realism will be analysed through different perspectives:

- a) Realism as connection between reality and text (Hamon, Grant);
- b) Realism in terms of the relation between author/reader and text (Sara Mills).

We cannot leave unnoticed the fact that Realism was not just a literary movement of the past. Over the years it has been revisited in different guises and in autobiography we will see some of Realism’s characteristics, the essential one being the telling of the truth as a maxim. Truthfulness and authenticity were/are a strategy to persuade the reader to believe in the narrated facts. In the 19th Century for example this was the abolitionists’ aim when they sponsored the publication of slaves’ narratives. Those first-person testimonies would impress the readers more profoundly than any other kind of antislavery discourse. Autobiography thus has a rooted position in one of the narrative traditions of oppressed black people. As William L. Andrews notes: “African Americans had been dictating and writing first-person

accounts of their lives for almost a century before the first black American novel appeared”².

Throughout the second chapter slaves’ narratives and their use of Realist techniques will be focused on. Their importance to our understanding of discrimination against black people nowadays will also be analysed. This is also going to be essential to our comprehension of black women’s position in many contexts. They were oppressed and discriminated against by everyone around them: white male authority, white women’s hierarchical supremacy and black men’s sexism. It will also be observed how slaves and black women became empowered by the use of language, that is, there is a connection between speech and power and empowerment was only gained by these two groups when they asserted their voice. The problem of the subaltern being able to speak or not as treated in the theories of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha will also be raised.

Slaves’ narratives and women’s autobiographical writing also have another point in common: both of them invite identification which may lead to a process of consciousness that attempts to be responsible for a source of strength and transformation. This consciousness will lead to a journey of not only self-discovery but also of the disclosure of the surrounding world. The question of the self and how this self is revealed in autobiography will also be dealt with. The latter will be analysed more specifically in chapter III. Some Realist techniques and the problems they pose in autobiographical writings will also be examined. To make things clearer the act of ‘writing autobiography’ as examined by bell hooks will be analysed step by step, which will expose the difficulties one goes through when writing such texts. To end chapter III, different terminologies some critics have given to autobiography, namely: autoautography, autophylo- graphy and autogynography will be analysed. Through this analysis we will realise that Sindiwe Magona’s works can be called autophylo- graphies as they do not speak about an individualised “I” but of a collective one.

That is, the “I” referred to in her works represents a “we” – all women who worked as domestic servants as she did and who climbed away by their own effort.

Autobiographical writing as a genre has proved very difficult to define as well although it is mostly concerned with the self and memory. But memory may be unreliable and when one tries to recall details of early life in particular, it is often necessary to turn to others' memory, which in turn, is equally unreliable. Another factor which contributes to its unreliability is that one also tends to remember what one wants to remember. Some autobiographies may even be largely fictional as is the case of Rousseau's famed *Confessions*, published in 1781.

Laura Marcus quotes Roy Pascal's notion of autobiography as the “reconstruction of a moment of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived”³. This seems a too ambitious claim as it is virtually impossible to tell events exactly as they have happened due to the many factors which alter the production of the “truth”: the passage of time is the most striking factor due to its contribution to a loss of memory in relation not only to some of the details of the past but also in relation to the feelings or reactions that arose as a consequence.

As autobiographies are considered non-fiction we are tempted to see them as simply objective narratives, but as we have mentioned it is impossible to tell the exact truth not only because of the tricks memory plays but also because the autobiographer has to choose what to write and as a consequence he/she has to be subjective, not to mention the mere fact of key words often assuming elastic meanings. Because of this we must bear in mind the tacit agreement between reader and writer concerning the degree of truth. “It is claimed that the ‘intention’ to tell the truth, as far as possible, is a sufficient guarantee of autobiographical veracity and sincerity”⁴. Nevertheless, as Margaret J.

Daymond claims, we must not forget that this subjectivity also arises because every individual is influenced by their gender, social class and surrounding environment of factors such as family, school and community :

autobiography is mediated in the sense that it cannot be written outside discourse; even a resistance discourse, such as the celebration of blackness, will be contaminated by the dominant values of the society in which it functions⁵.

As a consequence autobiography cannot be exclusively individual nor can it be read as the direct reflection of experience or even simply as the individual's subjective point of view as it also encapsulates the events of history and the events of the life of the autobiographer, his/her opinion and how he/she observes and understands the surrounding events.

Laura Marcus adds that autobiography may also be taken as a useful form of exposing the processes of exclusion and marginalisation often found in colonial life. This claim refutes the theory of autobiography being an exclusively Western genre and writers of autobiography in non-Western cultures have broken with the limiting, culturally self-serving rules of the genre. Bell hooks points out that these autobiographies are texts in which writers affirm fellowship because they need to tell their story in terms of themselves as individuals. Especially because of this last point autobiography can also be useful in understanding cultural identity. Autobiography can further function as healing, as Magona confesses about writing:

brings me healing. It is therapeutic. Writers write about what they know. And that knowledge is sometimes far from pleasant. But it is in writing about our disappointments, our failures, our losses, our

defeats, and our pain and suffering that we discover the startling fact that we have survived all this and perhaps even thrived ⁶.

Magona is also giving voice to her community: the Xhosa people but also to all women who are oppressed, especially domestic workers, who are such a concern to her that she highlighted their lives in her volume of short stories *Living, Loving and Lying Awake At Night*.

Summing up some of the changes autobiography has undergone:

narrators include myth, history, and teaching stories as central structural components of their life stories. This structure challenges canonical Western notions of autobiography in several ways: it replaces the model of autonomous individual narrating a single (and singular) life with a relational subjectivity narrating and individual (but affiliated) life; and it extends the autobiographical project temporally by stretching the boundaries of one person's life (no longer just from birth to death) and insisting on the mythic and historical networks of identity formation. Community and its values, restraints, and obligations are woven into the narratives so that they do not need to be explained.⁷

In chapter four we will see how Magona deals with these issues in "writing Life". We will see how she deals with three children sans husband, and how she is able to survive through the harsh conditions the South African government imposed on her. Some of the theories of autobiography will also be mirrored in her autobiographical texts.

Finally in Chapter five we will focus on the techniques used by Sindiwe Magona to enrich her two volumes of autobiography. We will

realise that most techniques she uses are commonly called Realist Techniques although she also puts in her writing certain personal touches especially irony.

Liz Stanley sums up perfectly what a Realist autobiography problematic encapsulates:

An interest in the textual representation of particular lives emphasises the highly problematic nature of Realist views of auto/biography, emphasising the necessarily selective nature of memory, of evidence, of what is included and excluded, and also the equally necessary role of the conventions of narrative form and the concomitant infusion of auto/biographical products with fictive devices of various kinds. A concern with auto/biography shows that 'self' is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but certainly a highly complex truth: a fictive truth reliant on cultural convention concerning what 'a life' consists of and how its story can be told both in speech and somewhat differently, in writing. But this does not mean that such writings have no points of connection with the material realities of everyday life: it rather emphasises how complex this relationship is and that neither Realism nor a total rejection of it will do⁸

Autobiography was once considered an inferior category of history writing. It has, indeed, been categorised as a sub-category of history writing and as a consequence it has been devalued. But from the 1950's onwards autobiography has been recognised as a literary act with its own specific characteristics – as a genre and as Gusdorf explains “autobiography is what history is not”⁹. Then he further elucidates us

The value of autobiography is seen to lie in its 'insider' quality: the autonomous status of autobiography is based on its separation from forms of history-writing, where history was and is defined as an 'objective', 'documentary' approach to lives and events. Psychological and philosophical issues filled the space left by the rejection of history.¹⁰

This is, history is considered objective in its retelling of events and autobiography is considered much more subjective as it has as its centre the self and not the historical context in which it is inserted. James Olney explains that "Autobiography lies between 'literature' and 'history' or, perhaps, philosophy, and between fiction and non-fiction; it becomes an acute expression of the already contested distinction between fact and fiction"¹¹. Once more we see autobiography in the middle between the two opposing elements: fact and fiction. Nevertheless it is also true that we cannot link it exclusively either to fact or fiction, objective or subjective narration of events. The autobiographer writes bearing in mind the truth and the "illusion that the past can be captured (as it was)"¹². Gusdorf points out that "the solution in the case of autobiography is to understand it not as an 'objective' document but as 'the parable of a consciousness in quest of its own truth'"¹³. That is, we must see autobiography as the truth of that life or self; in Gusdorf's own words "the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of man"¹⁴. Even the not so objective or truthful events about the self or his/her life will be still "true evidences of himself, and truer to human nature than the absolute knowledge that the novelist often pretends to"¹⁵ – as Roy Pascal explains.

Memoirs are also sometimes paralleled with autobiography. For several critics the author of memoirs is usually someone who has observed some point of history at close range while it was happening and/or someone who has played an important role in that same event. Although memoirs undoubtedly reveal the personal tastes and

character of the author they have as their main focus outward happenings and other persons apart from the author, while the “special prerogative of autobiography [is] to show life from the inside”¹⁶ and has as its centre the self who writes, therefore it is not a form of autobiography. To understand why memoir and autobiography are somewhat leaky critical terms we must go back to the end of the 18th Century when the word autobiography was coined. Before that period ‘memoir’ was frequently used referring to works now called ‘autobiographies’.

Georg Misch¹⁷ explains that autobiography derives from life itself rather than the formal category of literature, that is, he believes that autobiographies include a wide variety of forms. Autobiographies as Misch sees them are enriched by an enormous range of written forms and in them we are expected to see ‘life’ instead of ‘art’. Memoirs are seen as more static in relation to the world and their writers present themselves as mere observers of the events they write about. As Marcus explains, memoirs and autobiographies can be presented in forms of dichotomies: while autobiography is connected to inner, private life, memoirs prefer outer, public life as their subject. This distinction seems to be dependent on the amount of self-revelation the work contains, as Marcus adds, this distinction “ostensibly formal and generic- is bound up with a typological distinction between those human beings who are capable of self reflection and those who are not”¹⁸. Misch also explains that “the writers of memoirs, conversely, efface themselves within the histories they observe and record. It is no accident that *women have tended to write ‘memoirs’* rather than ‘autobiographies’”¹⁹ (my italics). Misch seems to imply women don’t have the capacity of writing about their self, their evolution and change as individuals, as members of a society and belonging to a certain culture, all of which are in constant mutation. Sindiwe Magona is therefore an exception to Misch’s ‘rule’ as she presents us with a panoply of inner feelings, enriched by her “losses, lacks, and lapses”²⁰(TCC,16), where she presents a human being who is “the result

of errors, horrors and coincidence”²¹ (FG,192), and who was able to overcome the harsher conditions of her life and escape destitution, especially due to her own effort.

Chapter I - Realism

Realism, as a literary strategy, appeared in Europe around the 19th century as a consequence of the transformations which prose fiction had been going through since around the 1830's. It was not as cohesive as Romanticism had appeared and it was only possible to construct a definition through the analysis of some Realist texts. Even nowadays it is difficult to give a suitable definition. What critics usually try to do is to enumerate a number of characteristics that help us to understand what a Realist text is in Europe for instance, as the characteristics that would define Realism change from Western Europe to the United States and Russia.

The main difference lies in the socio-political contexts in which writers were involved, a defining characteristic for French writers like Stendhal or Balzac, for example, who are usually seen as the parents of Realism. This interest in politics can be justified as France since 1789 had been subjected to several political and social convulsions which by 1830 still had not worked out their full consequences. By this time any novelist that was able to present a clear vision of the contemporary state of society and who could analyse the different trends existing at that period had more chance of success.

Stendhal's *Scarlet and Black*, 1830, for example, was highly influential as it exposes the events that had taken place before the Revolution: the struggle the old aristocracy had to go through to re-establish their authority lost in 1789, the growing importance of the Jesuits (once again) and the new danger to social stability presented by the educated, ambiguous but underprivileged youth of the country incarnated in his hero, Julien Sorel. It appeared to encapsulate, in dynamic form, the forces that had gone into making the France of his readers' time.

Balzac embraced his career at about the same time as Stendhal, and followed his narrative footsteps with the device of a young man

who came from the provinces to the capital believing in the maxim "to do or die" ("agir ou mourir"). This is usually the feature of his characters in for example *Le père Goriot*, 1834, or *Illusions Perdues*, 1837. But Balzac, a far more prolific writer than Stendhal and with more wide-ranging aims, decided at an early stage to structure his entire fictional output in order to provide a complete contemporary history of a kind no novelist had ever attempted before. This was *La Comédie Humaine*, 1842, published in a series, which he did not complete as he died too soon to be able to fulfil the ambitious task of including every aspect of human life: successes, failures, marriage, adultery, children, etc. He would deal with the whole of the social spectrum of his day, with every trade and profession, in the provinces as well as in the metropolis; there would be novels illustrating the kind of problems caused by problems of his day such as the troublesome presence of the surviving veterans of Napoleon's armies, by the laws of inheritance and by the dowry system, and by eternal subjects like marriage and adultery, by business failures and successes; only the sufferings of the emerging proletariat failed to call his attention.

Inspired by *The Human Comedy* was Émile Zola who initiated his own series called *Les Rougon-Macquart*, limited to twenty novels, which dealt with a later period of French History. Meanwhile Gustave Flaubert was publishing his novel *L'Education Sentimentale* which had as its central background the 1848 Revolution. Flaubert confined himself to the scene in the metropolis itself, as reflected in the often uncomprehending observations of his ingenuous hero Frédéric Moreau. "Frédéric, who drifts through life aimlessly, has at his side his old schoolfellow Deslauriers, in whom one can recognize a variant of the same type of pushful *arriviste* as Stendhal had created in Julien Sorel and Balzac in Eugène de Rastignac, though Deslauriers is less successful in his career than the latter" ²².

The second main characteristic of Flauberts' work is the simplification of the plot. *Madame Bovary* (1857) is one of the first

examples of this. In fact the first title of *L'Assommoir* by Zola was *La Simple Vie de Gervaise Macquart*. First the truth about Gervaise Macquart as well as her simple life all concentrated in the same novel. The readers of the novels do not find mystery or surprise, what they get is the "impression of a flat, undramatized truthfulness" ²³.

However, some Realist novels also accepted big subjects with complex plots. That is the case of *War and Peace* in which Tolstoy embraced a giant theme trying to delineate what war and peace are and how they are related to ordinary people's lives. Apart from the campaigns, victories and defeats, the events that affect Tolstoy's characters have nothing out of the ordinary: old people die, young people fall in love and out of it, get married and have children. We must not think however that Tolstoy only chose these philosophical themes for his novels as he also wrote *Anna Karenina* which, as the title suggests, has as its central character Anna who appears to be caged in an unloving marriage, ending up by solving her problems by committing suicide. Unhappy women trapped in the bond of marriage are also the theme of Eça de Queirós's *Primo Bazílio*, in Portugal, *La Regenta* by Leopoldo Alas, in Spain and *Effi Briest* by Fontane, in Germany.

This theme is also going to be embraced by Thomas Hardy in works such as *Jude the Obscure*, but he did not have the success he wished for (as he might have had in continental Europe) which testifies to the differences between Realism in Europe and America or England. One of the most important problems the Realists had to face was that of making dull, uninteresting and depressing material sufficiently absorbing, leaving out artificial aids such as suspense and mystery.

The characters in the novels of Flaubert, Tolstoy, Zola and other writers are undoubtedly "people of our sort" ²⁴, which does not mean that we see ourselves behaving as they do but that we can understand

what makes them behave as they do. They are never extraordinary nor are their fates exceptional or at least not in terms of their societies.

A fuller estimate of English Realism as a cultural achievement however begins with this recognition: that verisimilitude is an abstraction: "[t]he life-likeness of Realism depends on a particular set of rules for the disposition of concreteness and detail, as well as of value and questions of ultimate concern. Because the Realistic convention distracts attention from its artificiality it may be in fact one of the most artificial of all conventions."²⁵ In any case, verisimilitude, or Realism, or the illusion of lifelikeness is no simple or natural expression.

Realism is defined by Roman Jakobson as a "monster with many heads desperately in need of disentangling" ²⁶. This might be explained by the variety of definitions authors have of Realism, which usually depend on what qualities a particular reader associates with it. For example, some of the qualities more or less casually assumed to be evidence of Realism are, to name a few, "particularity, circumstantiality, humble subject-matter, viewpoint, chronology, interiority, externality"²⁷. While each of these qualities has some importance in Realism, none of them explains the Realist convention. In fact George J. Becker reaches a stage of confusion when he proposes that "it would add to ease of discourse in the future if whatever happens next should be given a new name and not be tagged by some variant or permutation of the word *realism*" ²⁸. J.L. Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* offers one of the most interesting studies of the word Realism. Austin was a philosopher of language and believed the concept of Realism could be made clearer if the proper attention was given to the words used to express it. He started by studying the word "real" and found that there are two

apparently contradictory assertions: 'Real' is an absolutely *normal* word, with nothing new-fangled or technical or highly specialised about it. It is, that is to say, already firmly established in, and very frequently

used in, the ordinary language we all use every day. Yet at the same time: 'real' is not a normal word at all, but highly exceptional; exceptional in this respect that, unlike "yellow" or "horse" or "walk", it does not have one single, specifiable, always-the-same meaning (...) there are no criteria to be laid down *in general* for distinguishing the real from the not real. How this is to be done depends on *what* it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases ²⁹(Italics in the original text).

Agreeing with this theory is Roman Jakobson who speaks about the ambiguity of the term Realism. In order to unraval this entangled expression he draws five defining characteristics of Realism:

a conscious awareness by both author and reader of a particular mode; its success; a stylistic preference for metonymic devices in which images are closely related in time and space to the things they describe(as opposed to metaphor, which links otherwise different things); the presence of 'redundancies' (...)and finally, the consistency of the prevailing mode and its realisation in the appropriate poetic devices³⁰.

Let's attempt to make this term clearer: as we know, Realism was born in the mid nineteenth century in France, and was defined by its clear opposition to Romanticism. It tried to abolish the fantasies and ideologies of that school, analysing society in what it imagined to be a scientific methodology, considering this the only correct approach to an objective study of social, psychological or material conditions. As all the other sciences (chemistry, biology, mathematics) were trying to disconnect themselves from sentimentality and the interest in spiritual characteristics of the Romantics, literature started looking for a reality

which would be authentic without artefacts: "here it proclaimed that the objects of perception *are* objects, and have a real existence outside the perceiving mind" ³¹.

To avoid the grandiloquence of the Romantics, Realism used a certain simplicity, directness and a written style without many adornments which leads Gustave Flaubert (while writing *Madame Bovary*) to lament, in his letters to a friend – Louise Colet – the almost impossible task of finding appropriate words for his commonplace subject, avoiding the extremes of triviality and lyricism. He wished to use appropriate but not ordinary words so as to avoid the vulgarity and the commonplace that would destroy his art:

What I am up against are commonplace situations and trivial dialogue. To write the *mediocre* well and to see that it maintains at the same time its appearance, its rhythm, its words is really a diabolical task, and I now see ahead of me thirty pages at least of this kind. Style is hard won! I am beginning over again what I did last week. ³²

Underneath this aura of simplicity there is a great effort although it is disguised in an ambience of naturalness. Writers write and rewrite matters until they find them suitable for their purpose as Flaubert claims in another letter to Colet on the 19th March 1854:

My work is progressing, though slowly and with *many corrections and re-writes* ... But it is an atrocious task! The order of ideas is the greatest difficulty. And then, since my subject is always the same, and takes place in the same environment, now that I am two-thirds of the way through it, I no longer know how to avoid repetitions. The simplest

phrase like 'he closed the door', 'he went out', etc
requires incredible artistic ingenuity! (my italics).³³

This sense of artfulness together with the belief that reality was able to be transposed into words led Realism to be considered a "naïve genre" as everything seemed and appeared so natural and easy. Nonetheless critics like Hamom and Lodge both believe that Realism achieves its ends "by means of a complex verbal activity that is far from simple"³⁴.

Balzac, one of Realism's mentors, claims in *Le père Goriot* that: "this drama is neither fiction nor a romance. All is true – so true that each one of you can recognise its elements in his or her own heart"³⁵. At the same time this kind of literature attempted to be popular, to direct itself at a mass audience who could see their lives, experiences and wishes exposed in the Realist text. This meant that Realism at this point tried to reflect the life of that epoch, to make a portrait of a certain period at a certain place with characters of that time. Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis* adds that the portrayal of the middle and lower strata no longer includes these characters as a motif for comedy but as the protagonists, the central characters of romances. This demands from the writer "the intelligent feeling and observation which sees a lesson, an emotion in a spectacle at any level, low or high, according to convention, and which always extracts this lesson, this emotion from the spectacle, knowing how to represent it completely, and to embed it in its social cadre"³⁶.

To help this visualisation of reality, Daguerre Niepe's method of photography was very important as it appeared to make reproduction of reality possible. This mirroring of reality and this need to be truthful to life formed a continuum with the artist's willingness to include the everyday, the commonplace, the felt nature of normal people's lives. This need to capture the texture of ordinary people's lives is going to be

the first problem Realist writers, as opposed to photographers, had to face given the resistant nature of words, given that they have double meanings and a certain history behind them; we create associations connected to words that prevent words from having an exact single meaning. Reaching this same conclusion, George Eliot advises us to "examine your words well, and you will see that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings – much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth" ³⁷. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot expresses the wish "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" ³⁸. She is aware however of the central difficulty of Realism, namely how to represent faithfully in words. Because of this contradiction, Maupassant distinguishes Realist art from mere photography as photography is only a frame, it does not transmit life while Realist art can show the vividness existing in real life. For this reason, he believed they should call themselves Illusionists as, for him, telling the truth was to give the *illusion* of complete truthfulness. He claims that it is the illusion of life that is captured by Realism, the 'Reality effect' ³⁹ is its basic feature and is usually achieved by building the scene with credible objects, believable time and place plausible situations and trustworthy characters. Related to Maupassant is Henry James, who is in favour of verisimilitude instead of a simplistic notion of truth. As Lillian Furst says:

The call for the truth to life was amended to the prescript of verisimilitude, plausibility, life likeness, while the necessity for shaping vision and artistic skill in presentation were openly acknowledged, although these latter elements were supposed to remain subservient to the observation of reality. ⁴⁰

It is obvious that a novelist cannot write down the exactly represented life of a certain character as numerous volumes would be

needed simply to reproduce a week in the life of that person, something revealed to us humorously in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1768). Because of this, the novelist has to choose the most important facts of that life, bearing in mind the notion of truthfulness. We cannot leave unnoticed the fact that they are also structured by the ideologies of the epoch, so telling the truth was an even harder task:

Balzac himself accepted the need for a novelist to be not only an historian but also an ideologue, undertaking to 'say *two things at once*, which cannot be taken for each other: on the one hand, he must tell the truth, he must know and he must display this knowledge; on the other hand, he must select and propagate a decorous fiction, that Monarchy and Catholicism alone can ensure the feature of French society' ⁴¹.

On the other hand, there are also elements of the truth that do not interest most readers (characters putting on their shoes, for example) so writers have to select and organise, as objectively as possible, the elements appropriately. Maupassant concludes that even "truth can sometimes not seem plausible. The realist, if he is an artist, will seek not to show us the banal photograph of life but to give us a more complete, more striking, more probing vision of reality itself" ⁴². This approach is on one level necessary (no one would or could transpose to words his/her or someone else's entire life) but on the other it goes against the whole theory of Realism as truth seeking ("Nothing but the truth and the whole truth" – as Maupassant puts it). Generally, however, this is realised to be impossible, and in Philippe Hamon's view, should not ever be lamented. In his *A Constrained Discourse* ⁴³ he shows clearly his sharp opposition to the notion of Realism as a copy of reality. To explain his position he makes a list of Realist characteristics and then explains some of their inherent contradictions:

1- The first characteristic is the flash-back, memory or summary that is, the text takes us back to something that has already happened before through the use of "*predictions*, presentiments, the fixing of a programme" ⁴⁴, that is, the text gives a hint of what will happen in the future. The use of heredity or the family chronicle also serve this purpose, along with the offering of the 'Reality effect' created by these detailed information. A family friend or a childhood friend or even the doctor are also some characters that might appear as they know the past of the characters. The introduction of the family is also valuable as they allow for some revelatory traits to come up like psychological crises (illness, crises of puberty, alcoholism) or even the scenes of the familiar environment which bring cheering family reunions, meals, anniversaries or disagreements between them (quarrels, misunderstandings). Another important aspect is that the names and surnames offer complementary information (the family history, hereditary deeds and predictability of behaviour) and grant an environment where the information intended to the reader may circulate in the form of title-tattle, gossip, curses and avowals.

2- The second aspect Hamon draws our attention to is the "*psychological motivation* of the characters, which functions as an a *posteriori* justification of the narrative functional web" ⁴⁵ (Italics in the original text). Characters want to fight against life's adversities so that they can show readers how to deal with everyday problems differently. It will show them an alternative, realistic way out as these characters provide role models to the readers.

3- There is also the element of intertextuality. The text might be religious or profane and serves to help the reader to understand the narrative, to guarantee that something is true and to foresee what will happen in the future. But the Realist text will doubtless privilege the profane text, that is history, which it will site as close as possible to its reader. References to an elsewhere will therefore be reduced, and the

Realist hero will not travel far from his or her environment. The historical and geographical proper names function as landmarks which validate the effect of Reality they intend to achieve at same time as they allow the economy of descriptive statement.

4- The fourth point highlighted by Hamon and related to the previous one is the text's readability in the form of the continuous use of names, surnames and names of places or streets which favours the visualisation of characters/places. For instance "Pinchpenny " will be the name chosen for a usurer and an idyllic place will be known as "Paradise". This onomastic feature is used frequently as is the characters' social life: they have family, friends or relatives – they are usually described in relation to the group so that we can understand the importance of group connections or family ties to explain certain personality traits or certain behaviour. Some names or surnames will connote the social class of the character; moreover if these identifying traits appear in that strategic site which is the title, the Reality effect will be ever more fruitful as they function as a true hint of the Realist genre (eg. Madame Bovary, Madame Gervaisais).

5- Realist discourse is often seen as paraphrasable as it can become redundant because of the need to give details constantly. If the author realises his or her readers will not understand his or her message, he or she will then try to show what he or she means by using illustrations, photographs, drawings, diagrams, paintings, or even the reproduction of information articulated by other specific art works (eg. "The paintings described in the discourse of Raymond Roussel, such as an engraving on the wall of the hero's room, for example, which reiterates or announces his destiny")⁴⁶. Hamon calls it a discourse "ostentatious with knowledge" ⁴⁷.

6- The Realist author has some knowledge ("his notes, his acquaintance with an object, an environment, a decor, some position of the referent")⁴⁸ which he or she considers to be exhaustive and that will

be put on paper in the form of descriptions. But there is a problem: how will he or she give it authority? How will the reader believe in what he or she is saying? How will he or she convince the reader of the truthfulness or the facts? The veracity of what the author wants to transmit may be:

incarnated in the narrative in a character who bears all the signs of scientific respectability: a medical description will be supported and carried by the mouth of a character who is a doctor, aesthetic information by the mouth of a character who is a painter, a description of a church or information about religion through the character of a priest ⁴⁹

This fictive person is no more than the justification, the plausible guarantor of the technical, lexical piece that needs to be placed. He or she is there to justify certain technical or specific vocabulary like: the priest's Latin, the technical terms of the painter, the aesthete, the doctor, a particular professional slang. Because of these characteristics, Hamon classifies Realist discourse as "Translative hypertrophy" ⁵⁰ which is a process of transmitting certain knowledge through a recognised authority on that subject. It often asserts its information with scientific proof so that if a kind of illness appears in the novel, a doctor will explain it, a legal case will be transmitted by a lawyer, etc. The typical characters of Realist discourse are then specialised characters like the engineer, expert, native, scholar, maniac, eccentric-on the part of the informed/the addressor - but we also have the addressee who will be incarnated in an uninformed character like the apprentice, voyeur, curious, disciple, autodidact, spy, gossip, explorer, intruder. And to justify these lexical segments, a desire for information, a wish to know more about the subject, will be invoked.

It should be noted finally that the three pretext-functions opening the descriptive sections (the

attentive *gaze*, the explanatory and voluble *word*, and the arranged and organised *technical act*, already noted in Homer by Lessing) can be combined: a certain character, for example, will demonstrate a locomotive before an apprentice who will watch him at work and to whom he will comment on the successive details of the pieces being manipulated, naming them one by one ⁵¹.

This thirst for knowledge may make the Realist author an avid reader of encyclopaedias and always after the most recent scientific discoveries. This is all justifiable if we admit their belief that assimilation of Reality is greater or smaller depending on the knowledge one has of the subject so that the more one knows the more Realist it would be.

7- Because of this last characteristic the Realist text is marked by a redundancy of information and the foreseeability of contents. For instance, for any given character we will have:

- a) The description of his or her socio-professional environment;
- b) The description of the place of his or her activity (the teacher will be described in school);
- c) The description of the professional activity itself (the teacher will be described in school teaching her/his students);

This reduces the characters to their professional activities or social role. In this sense it is typical of Realist texts to show scenes of moving in or out of home or other establishments as well as the rituals of daily activities: family meals, religious or civil ceremonies, fixed timetables, places or moments where each thing is classified, has its place, plays its role, is ranked. "For Realist discourse, an object (or a character) will thus essentially be (a) an amalgam of innumerable occurrences (its parts); (b) belonging to an endogenous network (such as a piece of furniture is part of a large decor which contains it); (c) or exogenous (the enumeration of its procedures of fabrication, its uses, its upkeep).⁵²

8- The eighth Realist characteristic is the delegation of the narration to a "narrator-character" ⁵³ as Hamon calls it. The narrator will then speak with authority as the story happened to him or her, or he or she reveals an event which he or she guarantees as real as it was entrusted to him or her as he or she was a professional expert on the matter. This tends to be presented in the opening scenes of these novels as they delineate their objectives right from the beginning. The reader will know from the start what he or she is going to read and what to expect. This is the main reason why the opening scenes of Realist works are so influential, for they define immediately a horizon of Realist expectations for the reader while concomitantly creating "an effect of reality and an indication of the 'genre'".⁵⁴

9- The foregrounded process of articulation will usually be rejected by Realist discourse and it will use "transparent writing dominated only by the transmission of information"⁵⁵. This is what Hamon calls the "neutralisation or *detonalisation* of the message"⁵⁶ which is the symmetrical absence of reader and author. This obliges the author to work with subtlety in order to confirm the truthfulness of information. This discourse will appear as "*demodalised* and assertive"⁵⁷ as it will deny the use of quotation marks, italics, emphases or terms of love and tenderness or even expressions like: "one would think", "one might say" which are characteristics of hesitation, irony, or speculative discourse. Therefore, Realist discourse tends to be somewhat serious; Hamon asserts that "Barthes in *S/Z* makes the serious the major characteristic of the readable text; Auerbach likewise. Consequently, this secondary but important problem for the Realist author: how to be witty?" ⁵⁸.

10- The hero/heroine sets another problem for Realist authors. He or she must be the centre of the novel and although he or she has setbacks the heroine/hero must keep the reader interested. The hero/heroine is presented in Realism as a problem given that having a

character as main attention focus might be dangerous as it may introduce subjectivity. To avoid this danger there may be a constant change of the point of view which also leads to another problem posed by critics: "Who or what is the hero of Zola's *Pot-Bouille*?"⁵⁹. The hero character is mainly used to present or introduce information and to guarantee it. Apart from that he/she is neglected as are other characters. When they are not needed to authenticate the discourse they are forgotten behind all those descriptions and enumerations.

11- Realist discourse, in order to achieve verisimilitude tries to avoid ambiguity, and in order to fulfil this task it tries to refuse puns or confusion between the literal and metaphorical. To act by these rules, it prefers precise vocabulary such as technical words or quantitative references. This use of technical, scientific, technological and historical discourse serves the purpose of transparency of language, which disguises the poetic nature of the discourse.

12- This discourse is always looking for what it feels to be the essence instead of the appearance. This is the reason why it avoids including invisible or mysterious selves as well as occult forces or characters:

(W)hose being doesn't coincide with their appearance: false characters, sexually ambiguous characters, hypocrites, homosexuals, castrates, characters endowed with ubiquity: this will also exclude scenes of recognition, brutal revelations of psychological traits, etc⁶⁰

13- The flow of the Realist text is always in a hurry to achieve its ends rapidly and to fulfil the reader's expectations. It rejects contrived suspense or the ellipsis of any information that might be important to the cohesion of the text. When a new character appears Realist discourse will soon give the reader the history of this character. The

description of his or her biography, physical and psychological traits, social backgrounds and their importance to the action. Hamon claims that “the realist discourse has a horror of the informational gap”⁶¹ that is, it avoids anything that might ruin the logical cohesion of the discourse.

14- The text is constructed in the form of dichotomies in which we see high and low, failures following victories, births after deaths, etc which also relates to a view of history as either cyclical or brutal, a zone of ceaseless conflict.

Hence the absence of a ‘nexus’, an often amorphous intrigue, chapter or narrative endings in the ‘minor’ key, without strong accentuation, without paroxysms, an intrigue strung together (rather than organised) by the elementary procedure of *conjunction* (encounters, reunions, meetings, receptions, arrivals, meals) or of *disjunction* (quarrels, separations, departures) of characters and/or places.(Lilian Furst, p.181)

15- The belief that the world was able to be described and denominated is also taken as certain. In this aspect it is contrary to fantastic texts where a monster or the incapability of naming things and describing them may be seen. Realist discourse embarks on the accumulation of facts to exhaustion which seems to display reality as a complex, discontinuous, numerable, nameable field which needs to be catalogued or listed: parataxis is then most common.

After enumerating these features we can summarise the contradictions of Realist discourse as follows:

- 1) The use of technical vocabulary as supposedly the most transparent in the transmission of factual or precise material, which poses the problem of its readability given that Realism was a kind of literature which aimed to reach the masses;

- 2) The rapidity with which the narrative gives information about new characters and places or situations which is opposed to the slowing down of the flow of the narrative by the never ending enumeration of details;
- 3) Authorial knowledge which is taken as truthful and the author's need to create a "fictive persona"⁶² to guarantee that knowledge;
- 4) Use of several characters to introduce and guarantee some pieces of knowledge but at the same time sidelining the hero and making certain characters simply disappear when they are no longer needed for the cohesion of the narrative;
- 5) The use of excessive vocabulary to transmit an idea or fact, foreseeability and repetitions at the same time. Realist discourse has problems with how to place those non – essential details which provoke the reality effect;
- 6) Style is taken as an element of cohesion and the author's knowhow but the text also appears as a mosaic of technical words, slang and idioms which dilute the author's style;
- 7) Linguistic knowledge: "the description unfolds the stereotypical and expected paradigm of the lexical series; this knowledge is common to reader and author"⁶³, but uses ontological knowledge to reveal the world's real and inner being. Only the author has this knowledge which gives the Realist text pedagogical intentions;
- 8) The discontinuity of flow and of denomination which leaves the reader puzzled and ruins the coherence of the text at the same time as it ruins the pedagogical intentions of the text.

Hamon's summary of the realist author's response to these issues is to suggest that:

[i]t is up to the author to resolve these contradictions in his own way by developing

adequate *compensatory systems*: the various kind of *knowledge* circulating must be 'put in phase'; the character of the technician will 'explain' the meaning of this or that unreadable technical term, the mobile character and the circularity of the comparisons will compensate for the synecdochic discontinuity, the childhood friend will 'unveil' mystery of a life story, etc. In these ways one feels the pressures exerted on realist discourse, a discourse more constrained than it appears ⁶⁴.

In Damian Grant's *Realism* he attempts to divide Realism into categories such as: conscious Realism and authentic Realism. He starts by pointing out what is wrong in naïve Realism: "Reality is not knowable – it may not be 'corresponded to' to be imitated, mocked, understood: such a notion is an impossible crudity"⁶⁵. He adds that if reality is examined with too much of a prior agenda it will hide and escape from the observer's point of view, that is if the author does not notice facts "naturally" his/her attention will be focused on what he/she wishes to see, her or his imagination will assert as reality what did not exactly happen but that fitted what she or he wanted. On the other hand, if the author believes intensely in reality, it will manifest itself in essence, in other words, reality will emerge as limpidly as possible. This goes against what has been expressed before. Grant seems to give a life to Realism, to personify it. Realism is not a memory that can be recalled and then simply emerge clearly. Real, Realist, Realism are all terms that are hard to define and they will not be purified just because one believes in them. Therefore it becomes possible to agree with authors like James Olney who prefer to use the word "intensity" instead of reality. He claims that "intensity gives in itself the communicated closeness of truth"⁶⁶ which we can link to what Flaubert called the "force interne". This internal strength creates a reality effect as it is the intensity of perception that approaches the desired level of truth. Maupassant follows the same line of thought as he calls realists

'illusionists' given that they use reality as a starting point, not an end to be achieved. As Grant explains "(T)he conscious realist does not reject the world (...), he maintains he has achieved a subtler and more satisfactory synthesis between those crude abstractions reality and imagination, and those equally crude adjustable spanners of criticism, objective and subjective" ⁶⁷. The main problem of the early Realists would then be, if not solved at least, dealt with more satisfactorily as the correspondence of the real and the work of art was no longer needed to make a Realist work. Grant firmly believes that what is required is the author's strong belief in his/her illusion of reality and the greater the intensity of his/her belief the greater Realism the text will achieve and readers will accept the author's reality as truth. On one hand this perspective seems plausible because the closer it is to the experience of the real world the more convincing the text will be. Nevertheless the author's intention by itself will not make a Realist text. His/her intentions will certainly not determine the effects of his/her work, for example.

The other type of Realism is Authentic Realism which is a term often used by feminists who claim that it is through the interchange between author/reader and text that Realism is achieved and not in terms of the relation between reality and text. The text is then discussed in terms of readability, the degree to which it relates to women's experience. This approach appeared as a consequence of the 'consciousness raising movement' of the 1970's. Women met in groups and discussed their experiences, reaching the conclusion that those experiences were not singular but often lived by many of them as a consequence of the patriarchal oppression they had had to endure. The main objective of this critical approach was to move on from consciousness – raising to use literature as a means of analysing and defining patriarchal oppression. This had the effect of increasing the number of fictional works written by women, many of which were often considered autobiographical because they included many features that recalled the authors' lives as well as the strategic device of being

written in the first person singular, lending an authentic patina to what was being written.

Sara Mills outlines four characteristics of this critical movement:

1. its anti-theoretical nature;
2. the close connection between female characters and ordinary women's experience;
3. the concern with the author (who sometimes is identified as character);
4. finally the emphasis on the pleasure of reading in search for a role model with different solutions to the same problems.

The first characteristic relates to the desire to write about women's experiences politically, with the objective of changing women's lives and altering their way of thinking and acting. To achieve this they needed to write simply and avoid theoretical terms as they prevent or interrupt the understanding of the text. It establishes right from the start a certain concern the author has for the reader. A kind of link and solidarity is established as a condition for this authentic Realist work.

The second element relates to the objective that is to make women conscious of their oppression. It is then best that the text refers to women's experience as "there is such a thing as women's experience" ⁶⁸. There are certain characteristics that are common to most women such as patriarchal oppression and child bearing and rearing, etc. There is an attempted identification between ordinary women and the female characters of these novels as these latter endure the same things women have to face in "real" life.

The concern with the author and her connection to the text is also very important as there are usually characters who have identifiably similar personality traits and who face limitations which the author has had to deal with in real life. Mills claims that "the distinction between

author and characters becomes in many of the essays, almost insignificant"⁶⁹.

Finally the last element is that these women discuss the pleasure they take when reading texts. They try to engage with them by actively searching for a role-model, a different way of dealing with everyday life and problems.

To sum up, the central feature of an authentic Realist reading of a literary text consists of relating elements of the text to women's experience in order to make women more aware of their oppression as a group; literature is seen as a powerful vehicle for changing women's self-image. In this type of analysis, female characters are described as successful if they are seen to depict women's lives in an authentic way, and if they seem to reflect the experience of the author. Literature and life are thus seen to be connected in the most intimate of ways"⁷⁰ concludes Sara Mills.

Whatever the definition, it will be seen that Realist Literature is perceived as a vehicle of information that would like to and is able to change people's lives. A historically significant use of this belief is going to be focused on in the next chapter of this work.

Chapter II- Slaves' Narratives

The so called “truth of life” was sought by Realist authors who attempted to write everyday life exactly the way it was. This wish to reveal the truth of facts is also present in autobiographical works. Truth is a vehicle of persuasion that is often found in slaves’ narratives. Their wish was to change people’s minds about slavery, so they tried to “write themselves into being. What a curious idea: through the mastery of formal western languages, the presupposition went, a black person could become a human being by an act of self-creation through the mastery of language” ⁷¹. We must remember that learning how to write was not only largely inaccessible to black people but also against the law. Those who could read or write had to hide it from their masters. Slaves were their masters’ property, they were things, not people who had ideas or feelings.

(T)o be the master of someone’s time is to control his body; to be the master of someone’s tongue is to control his self-presentation. And to seek to master someone’s tongue is to seek to expunge him from the order of language, to control his voice as a ventriloquist manufactures the voice of an inanimate puppet ⁷².

Slaves were, then, simply objects that were useful to work, to serve, and when they were too feeble or simply did not have strength to work, they were eliminated. We can even add that they were commonly exterminated when they were no longer needed or were too weak to work. Moreover, women were the ones who were more liable to suffer such a fate because of economic factors: they were not able to produce as much as men and when they were too old to get pregnant, that is to produce another asset for the master’s property, they were eliminated to serve as an example to the other slaves. ⁷³

Slaves' narratives are catalogued into two types: antebellum narratives that describe the hardships of slavery: how slaves were treated, where they lived, what they ate, their sufferings and how they were cruelly and brutally tortured to death: "the classic antebellum slave narrative highlights the brutalising horrors of slavery in order to justify forcible resistance and escape as the only way a black could preserve his or her humanity"⁷⁴. Postbellum narratives describe black people's lives after the abolition of slavery:

Instead he (narrator) asks his reader to judge slavery simply and dispassionately on the basis of what Booker T. Washington liked to call "facts", by which the Tuskegean meant something other than empirical data. In *Up from Slavery*, as in many other postbellum slave narratives, a factual evaluation of slavery exploits what William James would later call the "practical cash-value" of the word, its significance in the present day. What slavery was in the past is not so important as what slavery means, or (more importantly) can be construed to mean, in the present. (...) (S)lavery needed to be reviewed and reempowered as a concept capable of effecting change, of making a difference ultimately in what white people thought of black people as freedmen, not slaves. The facts of slavery in the postbellum narrative, therefore, are not so much what happened *then* - bad though it was - as what *makes* things, good things, happen now. ⁷⁵

There is a direct relationship between freedom and the act of writing or reading. James Olney says that Frederic Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself*, writes that: "literacy identity and a sense of freedom are all acquired simultaneously and without the first, he believes, the latter two would

never have been”⁷⁶. This is very important as it refers to the vicious circle slaves were in: as they were illiterate, they couldn't attempt to gain freedom and psychic freedom was only possible if they knew how to read or write. This leads us to the fact that freedom is connected to discourse and the silencing of voices to imprisonment. There is evidence that some slaves wrote their own passes to freedom. Whites' supremacy is linked to their power of discourse and black people (although forbidden) tried to keep their sense of humanity by writing (giving voice to themselves). Mr Hugh Auld whom Douglass serves in Baltimore, believes that “learning would spoil the best nigger in the world”⁷⁷ after having discovered that his wife was teaching some slaves how to read. Although this voice was forbidden to black people there was also the belief that they were naturally inferior and less intelligent. Even the famous philosopher Kant believed so. He, moreover, is one of the earliest major European philosophers to connect colour to intelligence: “But in short, this fellow was *quite black* from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was *stupid*.”⁷⁸

James Olney in an article called “I was born: slave narratives, their status as autobiography and as literature” says that:

The truth is that behind every slave narrative that is in any way characteristic or representative there is the one same persistent and dominant motivation, which is determined by the interplay of narrator, sponsors, and audience and which itself determines the narrative in theme, content, and form. The theme is the reality of slavery and the necessity of abolishing it; the content is a series of events and descriptions that will make the reader see and feel the realities of slavery; and the form is chronological, episodic narrative beginning with an assertion of existence and surrounded by various testimonial evidences for that assertion.⁷⁹

As many people understood it, there was a direct correlation between colour and intelligence. Nevertheless these “less intelligent beings” began writing mainly poetry, autobiographical narratives, political and philosophical discourses and succeeded in publishing individual histories where the “I” of the narrator became the “we” of the race. Although accused of not having a relation to formal published history, they were able to build a fragmented piece of history where the animalised, the slave, became a person, a human being.

We must bear in mind that the desperate need to show the world what slaves went through pushed these authors to focus more on some aspects, such as the way slaves were treated and beaten, and leave others out as they were felt to be unimportant to what they wanted to reveal. Sometimes this partiality was conscious but other times, as happened with Realist authors, it was simply too difficult to be objective: words have a history behind them and memory is a selective process. Rebecca Chalmers Barton in *Witnesses for Freedom*, has the same opinion:

Admittedly, the autobiography has limitations as a vehicle of truth. Although so long an accepted technique towards understanding, the self-portrait often tends to be formal and posed, idealized or purposely exaggerated. The author is bound by his organized self. Even if he wishes, he is unable to remember the whole story or to interpret the whole experience ⁸⁰.

Although authors try to be impartial, objective language itself is subjective, and distance also (as autobiography is a game of memories) affects our understanding of facts: what now is important some years later turns out to be irrelevant and vice-versa. Even the choice of

episodes or facts that one chooses to integrate in an autobiography is subjective. So, what happens to the theory of truth? With Realism the focus was put on the essence of reality, the “illusion” or *vraisemblance* of that reality and in autobiography what is important is the “ ‘inner’ truth of narrative” as Joanne M. Braxton puts it.⁸¹

W. E. B. du Bois in *Autobiography* explains how difficult it is to express the truth:

(t)hey (autobiographies) are always incomplete, and often unreliable. Eager as I am to put down the truth, there are difficulties; memory fails especially in small details, so that it becomes finally but a theory of my life, with much forgotten and misconceived, with valuable testimony but often less than absolutely true, despite my intention to be frank and fair.⁸²

When confronted with statements like this most readers of autobiography will feel sympathy: who has not gone through the same difficulty, even when simply speaking? Such confessions instead of undervaluing autobiographies allow us to regard them as more trustworthy than all the formal records that might exist of the situation. The author is speaking about his/her own experience and it is the feel of his/her life that he/she is narrating. Albert E. Stone in ‘Patterns in Recent Black Autobiography’ explains:

(t)hese “metaphors of self” to use Olney’s apt term, are the clearest evidence that actual experiences from the past and the words used to recreate and pattern them are originally tied to the deepest emotions and moral character of the living subject. Language thus unites all aspects of human

nature in tropes or figures which are as close to the “truth” as memory and imagination can devise.⁸³

It is this self that gives autobiography its real value. As Beauvoir puts it in *The Second Sex*: “it is her own self that is the principal – sometimes the unique subject of interest to the (female autobiographer)”⁸⁴. This issue of the self within the context of autobiographic writing will be resumed later in this chapter. This kind of confession was absolutely unthinkable to slave narrative writers because their concern was a political agenda that spoke for/to an audience/ a community that in fact transcended the interests of a single individual. So the ex-slave could not write more than a collection of episodic narratives as to write autobiographies one must use memory which can sometimes trick us. James Olney asserts:

Ex-slaves cannot talk about it because of the premises according to which they write, one of those premises being that there is nothing doubtful or mysterious about memory: on the contrary, it is assumed to be a clear, unfailing record of events sharp and distinct that need only be transformed into descriptive language to become the sequential narrative of a life in slavery. In the same way, the ex-slave writing his narrative cannot afford to put the present in conjunction with the past (...) for fear for in so doing he will appear, from the present, to be reshaping and so distorting and falsifying the past.⁸⁵

Because of all these conventions and the fear of being taken as liars postbellum slave narrative writers started believing in what has been called “Tuskegee Realism” where slavery was no longer the object of their writing but the subject of it. The rise of the consciousness of the former slave for whom slavery (as cruel as it might have been for him/her) was no longer taken as essential; what was important was to learn from that experience, what positive could

appear after that horrible period and how to attain it. William L. Andrews in 'The Representation of Slavery and Afro-American Literary Realism' , explains:

(s)lavery needed to be reviewed and reempowered as a concept capable of effecting change, of making a difference, ultimately in what white people thought of black people as freed men, not slaves. (...) The fact of turn-of-the-century American 'scientific' racism, which stereotyped 'the Negro' as degraded, ignorant, incompetent, and servile, demanded that slavery be re-presented anew, not as a condition of deprivation and degradation, but as a period of training and testing, from which the slave graduated with high honors and even higher ambitions. ⁸⁶

The prototype of Tuskegee Realism was *Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington who tries to pass as a Realist and who has as his main objective "to portray (himself) as a plain and simple man of facts, 'the real thing' among autobiographers" as William L. Andrews puts it ⁸⁷. Nevertheless this Realism was fought with its own weapons. To fight Tuskegee Realism, authors had to undermine its main goal, the "real and solid foundation" ⁸⁸ and as a consequence Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* was published. This novel was able to trick the reviewers as it contained all the elements of Realism and vraisemblance. It was written to be taken as a real and not fictional narrative. But is this novel less real because its supposed author does not exist? Is what the narrator say less valid because he is not a 'real man'? Was this fictional character able to fulfil his goal better than a real character? Was his representation more realistic? William L. Andrews answers:

(i)f Johnson wrote the ex-colored man's story with no other purpose than to unveil the cultural

conventions that predisposed his readership to believe an 'autobiography' by a doubly phony white man over a novel authored by a real black man, namely, Johnson himself, his effort must be considered a signal success in the history of Afro-American autobiography, as well as fiction.⁸⁹

No matter how one faces this fictional 'Realist' novel one must bear in mind that these were valuable texts that showed us the determination and courage ex-slaves had in writing. It is through these narratives that we know a great deal of what went on and what it was like. At least, we cannot deny their historical value. As Albert E. Stone points out:

What commands assent as 'true' is not everything which has happened to an individual, but rather those events, relations, ideas and feelings which in retrospect reveal significance by forming parts of a pattern or shape to life. The discovered design is the central truth of all autobiography.⁹⁰

Truthfulness was a strategy to show the horrors of slavery and to persuade the readers to fight against it. We cannot call those narratives autobiographies because of their episodic nature but nevertheless they are essential to our understanding of slaves' oppression, their quest for freedom and how it affected their lives.

Chapter III- Autobiography and Women Writers

In the previous chapter we addressed the issue of discourse as a means for slaves to move towards freedom. They used narrative to fight against the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery in search of freedom (physical, psychological, political and social). It was through the use of language that they were able to become beings and selves; before that they were simply racially inferior, animals that could be eliminated when the master decided. In black women's stories we have to account for all this history that is behind them (as with everyone's writing) but we also have to bear in mind that they had several other battles to fight; they had to face the masters' patriarchal authority, white women's racism and black men's sexism. If we think of a human pyramid, they would be at the bottom of the pyramid; then black men would be next, they had power over women, simply because they were men. Above black men would be white women, and above all of them the masters – male white authority. Black people were “naturally” inferior, so they had to be below whites and in a patriarchal society men were at the top of the pyramid – this is why black women were the lowest. In this sense the autobiographies written by black women were a weapon to fight against accumulated layers of oppression. It was a way to give themselves a meaning to life, a way of keeping themselves together and their self-esteem. Even today:

(t)wentieth-century daughters and grand-daughters of earlier ‘scribbling’ black women continued to write themselves through issues of individual and collective survival in a world that still denigrates blackness and privileges maleness over femaleness.⁹¹

The white master, the white female and the black women's own race males could have power over them socially, politically and physically. But nobody could have control over their thoughts and silences. One's words can be censored but thoughts, ideas and feelings are out of reach. The exterior, the other, can never have access to them

without permission. This, which can be called “soul”, was what kept most slaves alive and ready to fight against their oppressors and this also happened to black women. But can they really speak? As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, can the subaltern speak? Are the narratives that reached us the slaves’ real voice or a version of authority’s voice through the subaltern? Are what we have narratives written by women who reveal their inner thoughts, ideas, problems or have they been censored by way of their mediation by patriarchal power? Does the autobiographical “I” belong to the colonized or the colonizer?

According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this) the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) *can speak and know their conditions*.⁹²

Nevertheless Spivak does not seem to share the same view and asks once more “with what voice – consciousness can the subaltern speak?”⁹³. They were given few chances and furthermore why should subalterns speak if they were not given any moral, aesthetic and historical value? It is at this moment that this subaltern consciousness arouses an important issue: a subaltern text is not only important for what it says but also for what it cannot say. Its silences speak louder than words. It is a way of “insurgency”.⁹⁴ However, she reaches the conclusion that:

(t)he question is not female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is ‘evidence’. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the

ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.⁹⁵

No matter what, according to Spivak, the male will always be dominant and the subaltern will always be under his domain and when we refer to the female subaltern it is even worse as she is racially inferior and female in a patriarchal society. But if they cannot speak as Spivak puts it, how do we know what happened to slaves? How do we learn about patriarchal oppression? The only way to survive was to resist, to fight back and only by becoming subjects (and not mere objects) could they speak. Gareth Griffiths in "The Myth of Authenticity": It is clearly crucial to resistance that the 'story' of the Indian continues to be told. It is only through such counter-narratives that alter/native views can be put.⁹⁶

Although masters try to silence subaltern voices it is of vital importance that they resist, that they keep fighting back. Homi K. Bhabha in "Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" writes that the possibility of subaltern speech exists mainly and especially when its mediation through mimicry and parody of the dominant voice subverts and threatens the authority within which it necessarily comes into being⁹⁷. In a different article⁹⁸ he refers to Said who, in Bhabha's perspective, is always suggesting that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser which Bhabha considers to be a historical and theoretical simplification. Bhabha, then, strongly believes it is possible for the subaltern to speak although he/she has to undermine the patriarchal/ colonising authority by using mimicry and parody. This writing embodies a struggle to survive. It is a way of fighting against the patriarchal and coloniser's system and of providing a different view from the dominant ideology, that is, a different perspective from the

same Reality. This is also valid for women writers since we have seen in the last chapter that women's problem are not unique, aspects of them are shared with other women. It is this recognition that invites identification and at the same time it contains a process of self-knowledge. Women's sense of collective identity can also be a source of strength and transformation. It builds a double consciousness of the self: the self as it is culturally defined and the self different from this cultural image. Stanford Friedman in "Women's Autobiographical Selves" asserts that "(i)t is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness".⁹⁹ In this same article Friedman says that women, by taking the power of words and representation in their own hands project onto history not only an individualistic purely collective identity but a new identity that merges those two together. The self that is created in woman's texts is not built as "an isolated being", not against others but with others in an "interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community ...(where) lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being".¹⁰⁰ In this sense Bernice Johnson Reagon (quoted by Friedman in this article) says that black women's autobiographies are "cultural autobiographies"¹⁰¹ because the past self of a black woman is mingled and inseparable from her sense of community: "We are, at the base of our identities, nationalists. We are people builders, carriers of cultural traditions, key to the formation and continuance of culture"¹⁰².

Autobiography and especially the confessional type of autobiography leads essentially to a journey of discovery of the self as well as others. The author has to look for his or her roots and usually through the recollection of the past the author/narrator sometimes discovers things he/she had already forgotten and that are different from the personality he/she now has. He/she finds out things he/she did

or said that he/she does not believe in now. If it was in the present they would not act the same way or say the same things that they did or said back then. And “the others” (males or community) can be seen in a different perspective. This supports Emile Benveniste’s theory of the “I” who speaks being different from the “I” who is spoken about. For Benveniste language itself builds subjectivity and it is only through language that an individual becomes himself/herself as a subject: “It is in and through language that an individual constitutes himself as a subject, the I who is uttering the present instance of the discourse”¹⁰³. Felicity Nussbaum shares the same opinion and in “The Politics of Subjectivity and the Ideology of Genre” says: “The ‘I’ is a shifter, always changing its referent in time and space. The split subject, then, allows for the recognition that the ‘I’ who is writing is distinct from the ‘I’ who is written about” ¹⁰⁴.

Writing one’s life can be used as a therapy, to make the ghosts of the past disappear. Sometimes, in life, there are situations that impose a certain behaviour afterwards. Those situations can be traumatic (difficult childhood, violation, rape) or simply things that do not seem to fit the present “I” and that keep tormenting the individual. Writing, can, then, be used as a liberating movement, as a way of getting one’s past out of the way. This is what bell hooks refers to in “Writing Autobiography”:

(t)o me, telling the story of my growing up years was intimately connected with the longing to kill the self I was without really having to die. I wanted to kill that self in writing. Once that self was gone-out of my life forever. I could more easily become the me of me. It was clearly the Gloria Jean of my tormented and anguished childhood that I wanted to be rid of, the girl who was always wrong, always punished, always subjected to some humiliation or other, always crying, the girl who was

to end up in a mental institution because she could not be anything but crazy, or so they told her. She was the girl who sat a hot iron on her arm pleading with them to leave her alone, the girl who wore her scar as a brand marking her madness. Even now I can hear the voices of my sisters saying “mama make Gloria stop crying.” By writing the autobiography, it was not just this Gloria I would be rid of, but the past that had a hold on me, that kept me from the present. I wanted not to forget the past but to break its hold. This death in writing was to be liberatory.¹⁰⁵

Later she explains that she tried to write several times, but there was something blocking her way: secrecy and silence. The secrecy of family affairs that were absolutely private and that her mother wished to keep that way, and silence which kept those ghosts inside of her. When she started writing she realised that it was not only through intellectual work that she could reach those memories. On the contrary, usually it was sounds and smells (what she calls “scent of memory”¹⁰⁶) that activated those memories. When they were lost those memories came in a rush, all at the same time like a thunderstorm: “They came in a surreal dreamlike style which made me cease to think of them as strictly autobiographical because it seemed that myth, dream and reality had merged”.¹⁰⁷

There were several incidents about which she, now, does not know if they were real or if the infant bell hooks invented them because she was terrified they might happen and they became so vividly and authentically engraved in her memory that it is hard to distinguish what really happened or not. Another problem was that while talking with her siblings she became aware that the situations or facts were apparently the same but their details were different. This makes it clear that autobiography has certain limitations and as bell hooks puts it:

“Autobiography is a personal story telling – a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as we remember and invent them”. ¹⁰⁸As we have seen this inauthenticity is not created on purpose. The past sometimes mingles with our fears, objectives, wishes and gains a life of its own which makes it hard to separate what really happened and what did not, what is real and what is fantasy.

Hooks has a memory that she could swear was the truth and nothing but the truth but according to her mother never existed so:

Again I was compelled to face *the fiction* that is part of all retelling, remembering [...]. As I wrote, I felt that I was not as concerned with accuracy of detail as I was with evoking in writing *the state of mind, the spirit of a particular moment*. ¹⁰⁹(my italics).

This recalls the notion of “vraisemblance” of the Realists. It was/is difficult to capture the reality into words so what is important is the truthfulness of that moment/epoch. What is essential is the notion that something might have happened in that period because it has several characteristics that match the reality of the time. The basic structure of Realism is the capturing in words of the feeling of that moment, exactly what bell hooks calls the true “state of mind and spirit of the moment” ¹¹⁰. At this stage we realise that most authors believe fiction/imagination is part of the process of autobiographic writing.

At the end of her work, bell hooks discovers she has not killed the Gloria of her childhood. She is able to see that period from a different perspective, not as an isolated part of her life but as an essential part of her continuum. This therapy made her realise that instead of killing that piece of her childhood she was able to recover it:

She was no longer the enemy within, the little girl who had to be annihilated for the woman to come into being. In writing about her, I reclaimed that part of myself I had long ago rejected, left uncared for, just as she had often felt alone and uncared for as child. Remembering was part of a cycle of reunion, a joining of fragments, “the bits and pieces of my heart” that the narrative made whole again ¹¹¹

To build her autobiography bell hooks consulted her siblings which accounts for what we have seen, that in women’s autobiographical texts the “self” is not built in opposition to or against others, but that on the contrary this autobiographical self is produced with others – including males. Nancy Chodorow believes that “Girls come to experience themselves as less differentiated than boys, as more continuous with and related to the external, object-world and as differently oriented to their inner object-world as well”¹¹². Does this mean that only women/girls can feel this sense of community. Can only women feel a continuum with others and men can not? Does only female experience of self contain more flexible ego boundaries? Is it true that boys define themselves as in opposition, distinct and different from girls? Do not girls do the same? Do boys feel the denial of connection with girls, family, community more strongly? Are they the only ones to deny the interrelation between men and women? I strongly believe that that these differences that Chodorow speaks about are not so rigid. Neither do all women feel a sense of community, of the group, in their self nor do men deny femininity. In my experience I have found out that there is a stage of development, around ten or eleven years old, where boys and girls avoid playing with each other, avoid any relationship with their age-group of the other sex, because they are worried about discovering themselves, especially their body. I also think both boys and girls may feel an intimate relationship with their family, group, community. As I have argued before, our life experience and the environment around us such as family, society, school and

religion influences our “self” and thus our behaviour. If we read Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* it seems that it is only men who have that sense of community. First of all, in Achebe’s novel women are almost non-existent and besides that in a patriarchal society like that of the Igbo men were the only ones allowed to enter community meetings to participate in the decision making process. In Sindiwe Magona’s autobiographical works the intimate connection with her community, with her neighbourhood is extremely important as she felt she could rely on others to take care of her children when she went to work, but, more than that, community for her was also responsible for her education: “I wasn’t brought up by my parents alone. We had the extended family and the whole community. The saying that it takes a village is very true. The African village was wise, it tended its young”.¹¹³

We cannot be as radical as Chodorow: there are men who feel the group relation more strongly and there are women who build their “self” in opposition to males. If we took Chodorow’s theory rigidly we would have to define male/female autobiographies, because they would be markedly different. I believe they are not. This gender theory would complicate even more the task of defining autobiography, which is already difficult to do.

Echoing Jakobson who said Realism was a monster with many heads desperately in need of disentangling autobiography is also in James Olney’s words, “not one thing but many”¹¹⁴. Olney goes on to say that “there are almost as many senses of the word of autobiography as there are autobiographies, for every instance of the mode tends to establish its own ad hoc and sui generis conditions and form”.¹¹⁵

Autobiographies can be written as a diary, confession or narrative. They can be organised through chronological order or through the author’s important moments in his/her life: like the loss/death of a personal friend or relative, childbirth, a divorce. By all this, we realise that there is not one set of rules that defines

autobiography, which poses problems to historians, to literary critics or students of the area. Reading definitions such as the one given by Marcello Duarte Mathias it does not seem very difficult:

Autobiografia: relato de uma vida pelo próprio, sendo o autor simultaneamente o destinatário e o personagem-objecto da narração. Desde logo, convém sublinhar que o exercício autobiográfico se situa na perspectiva do tempo que procura exumar e reconstruir. Retrospectiva ordenada quase sempre em função de critérios cronológicos, apresenta-se como um todo e como um todo pretende ser considerada.¹¹⁶

It seems quite easy, but the truth is that if we analyse the word autobiography in its several elements we will understand where the difficulties start: (This also echoes what was difficult for the definition of Realism)

- autos means the self or himself/herself
- bios means life
- graphein means to write.

As we have seen autobiography does not have a set of rules and it does not also mean it is about an easily identified “I”. Hertha D. Sweet Wong emphasises in “First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women’s Autobiography” that the “I” with which women refer to themselves does not represent a singular but a plural person. Women refer not only to themselves alone but to the group “women” and usually they mirror themselves in other women’s work. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to the critic Barbara Christian’s experience when she first read the auto biographical novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by Paule Marshall: “(it) was not just the text; it was an accurate and dynamic embodiment both of the possibilities and

improbabilities of my own life. In it I as subject encountered myself as object.... It was crucial to a deeper understanding of my own life” ¹¹⁷

But let's go back to our subject: the self (auto). As has been mentioned the self who speaks(writes) is different from the one who is being spoken about. The person we are today is distinct from the one we were a few years before. Echoing Lacan: It is like the baby who looks at itself in the mirror and does not recognise itself. The one in the mirror is another baby – it is the other. The baby looking at the mirror at a certain stage then says: that is me. It is this split of the “I” that allows autobiography to pursue the truth the author has to acknowledge this difference of his or her “self”. The person he or she is today sees things in a distinct manner but has to try to imagine how he or she felt back then. In the essay “Authorizing the Autobiographical”, Shari Benstock refers to Gusdorf for whom “autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image; in such a mirror the ‘self’ and ‘reflection’ coincide”¹¹⁸. The self and self image coincide in autobiography according to Gusdorf, but can this be correct? Benstock then adds:

This definition of autobiography overlooks what might be the most interesting aspect of the autobiographical: the measure to which “self” and “self-image” might not coincide, can never coincide in language – not because certain forms of self-writing are not self-conscious enough but because they have no investment in creating a cohesive self over time. Indeed, they seem to exploit difference and change over sameness and identity: their writing follows the “seam” of the conscious/unconscious where boundaries between internal and external overlap.¹¹⁹

As Benstock points out, for Gusdorf, autobiography is not an exercise of self-discovery, of therapy or even a piece of work with pedagogical intentions (literature has often had the purpose of changing people's minds and we have seen that slaves' narratives also had this aim) but:

(t)he autobiography that is thus devoted exclusively to the defense and glorification of a man, a career, a political cause, or a skillful strategy... is limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence.¹²⁰

But he realises that it can be more than that when private or more intimate affairs are spoken about. Nevertheless he suggests that "the writer who recalls his earliest years is thus exploring an enchanted realm that belongs to him alone"¹²¹. Does this mean that there can be no identification? Cannot people recognise themselves in somebody else's writing? Are there not similar experiences that are lived by oppressed groups like women or minorities? Are not there resemblances between the master/oppressor coloniser and slave/oppressed colonised? Do not all these groups share some life experiences? This concept of autobiography (individualistic) does not recognise the importance of group identity for women (as we have seen before) or other oppressed groups. Friedman goes even further:

For Gusdorf, the consciousness of self upon which autobiography is premised is the sense of "isolated being," a belief in the self as a discrete, finite "unit" of society. Man must be an island unto himself. Then, and only then, is autobiography possible.¹²²

In psychoanalytic terms this is not possible as the self is formed through the interaction with others especially the parents and family, going through school, religious group and community or neighbourhood. Of course this influence has to be balanced and the individual needs to build his/her own self in a balanced manner: having traits of his/her own in spite of all those influences. He/she must be distinct from the others that belong to the environment that surrounds him/her. As Friedman summarises: “Nonetheless, psychoanalytic models of the autobiographical self remain fundamentally individualistic because the healthy ego is defined in terms of its ability to separate itself from others”.¹²³

Given all these theories we understand that this first element of the word autobiography poses some problems: on one hand there is a present “I” and a past “I” and autobiography is a recall of that “I”. The first person is in fact a third as the “I” is looking for the one of the past which is different, and on the other hand we have also the “I” who represents a group – though metonymic of the collective. But the problems of definition do not end here. The term bio/life is crucial and most critics once centred their attention on it. Nowadays the focus concentrates on “auto” /self, as we have already seen. Life – it can be the historical past from the beginning of the author’s life (and most early autobiographies started with the classical “I was born”) to the present day, or autobiography can deal with an important moment of the past, a piece of that past (e.g. childhood) or even the present life of the author but usually it encapsulates the combination of the author’s history (past) and present life. Nevertheless problems do not end here. James Olney goes even further:

(i)t could be life not as an individual property and possession , but life as a mythic history and the psychological character of a whole people – that communal life that gives its impress to the life of every individual within the group; and finally –

though this is not really “finally” since there are other possible senses of *bios* – it could signify, as in C.G. Jung’s *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* it does signify, psychic development, or what Jung calls the story of the process of self.¹²⁴

It may be the life of an “I” which represents a group, a “we” or the psychic development of the “self”: how one finds out his/her own identification/voice in a conditioning environment that starts with one’s family and the several stages one goes through until he/she finds his/her own path highlighting his/her own singularity or particularities. Finally writing poses an age-old problem. Autobiography’s purpose is to tell the ultimate truth about oneself and one’s life. But we have seen already that the truth is not only difficult to define but also to transpose into words. Realists also had this problem and subjectivity was their major enemy. How can one tell the truth about one’s life if words are intrinsically subjective? How am I going to choose what to write in my autobiography as the very act of choosing is also tendentious? The realists choose the notion of *vraisemblance* and autobiographers realise that what is important is the feelings/emotions they felt as words “can never encapsulate the fullness of meanings which the author seeks and which would put an end to writing itself.”¹²⁵ Given all this complexity, some critics like James Olney or Domna C. Stanton have proposed several other terminologies. James Olney speaks about autoautography, which “serves to point up the highly individual and individualistic, intuned and self-centering nature (...) of western autobiography”.¹²⁶ This kind of autobiography, according to Olney, represent the ideology of the West: the life of this Western self is the true/real life because Occidentals tended to believe the African self, for example, was not distinguished enough to be written about. Once again this reminds me of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*: the whites’ supremacy and how they judged themselves superior to the blacks. This arrogant and pretentious manner of looking down on “the other” has also been present in the protocols of autobiography.

Olney quotes Montaigne, Jung, and Rousseau and the major similarity is that their autobiographies are self-centred. It seems their self is the only good reason to write. They intend to write about themselves, only and simply about their own self. The other important aspect that is pinpointed is that the omission or ellipsis of some facts, mistakes in dates or names, might occur but they are not worried because what is important is that they cannot analyse themselves as a scientific project, so that, for Rousseau:

(t)he true object of my confessions is to reveal my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life. It is the history of my soul that I have promised to recount, and to write it faithfully I have need of no other memories; it is enough if I enter again into my inner self. ¹²⁷

and for Jung:

I can only make direct statements, only 'tell stories'. Whether or not the stories are 'true' is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is *my* fable, *my* truth. ¹²⁸

Olney then refers to the fact that in Africa there is hardly a single "autoautography" but what we can find are plenty of "autophylographies." This term reflects the African tendency of analysing themselves as a group, not as isolated individuals. We are far removed from the "I simply myself" and are in a civilisation where "I" usually refers to "us". Bios is then replaced by phyle which means "a union among citizens of a state, a class or a tribe formed according to blood, a class or caste; a union according to local habitation, a tribe."¹²⁹ Autophylography is then a symbol of the life of the group, their rituals, beliefs and rules. The "self" of the autobiographer is built in relation to

his/her group. They recognise the value and importance of the community – this is what happens in Sindiwe Magona's case as we have seen before. She believes her community was essential to her growing up. The recognition that women's autobiographies are different from men's texts made Domna C. Stanton speak about autogynography, the word gynocratic referring to women centred texts. She goes through autobiographical characteristics that she labels as belonging to male or female autobiography but she ends up by discovering that there are no such things as androgynistic or gynocratic characteristics. Both men and women are capable of writing autobiographies in which their inner lives are exposed, the personal and intimate concerns of males are also presented at the same time that professional achievement is regarded as important for female autobiographers. Men's narratives are not always, linear, chronological or coherent while women's are not always discontinuous, digressive or fragmented. These characteristics fit both the male and female gender. In fact, "discontinuity and fragmentation constitute particularly fitting means for inscribing the split subject, even for creating the rhetorical impression of spontaneity and truth".¹³⁰ By the end of the article Stanton herself questions the existence of a gender-marked autobiography. She invites us to reconsider her initial arguments with respect to androgynistic or gynocratic writing when she recalls Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* where the author admits she might have told lies but that is up to the reader to decide when they hide and whether there are any valid statements at all. What we must assert is that there is in broad terms a Western style of writing autobiography and an African one (as James Olney puts it), so autobiographies written by European women will tend to differ from African ones. This difference is explained by Stanford Friedman who quotes Stephen Butterfield:

The "self" of black autobiography ... is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan. The self is

conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group... The autobiographical form [...] is a bid for freedom, a beak of hope cracking the shell of slavery and exploitation.¹³¹

No matter what the gender or the race of the autobiographer is the truth is that, he/she is always a displaced person in time and therefore also to some extent in socio-culture. However women have to face a double displacement insofar as discourse has been male-oriented and therefore it resists valorising women's experiences and histories.

Chapter IV – Writing Life: Sindiwe Magona's autobiographical
works - *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*

As slaves who gained a wider voice by writing about their lives, women also had as "origin of changes in women's status"¹³² an empowering act in the writing of autobiography. It was through autobiography that women shared and exposed their oppression beyond their immediate circles and showed the reader how they dealt with it and how they could overcome it. As David Callahan says "[l]ife writing has been intimately connected to the recuperation and circulation of women's voices, or marginalised voices in general, in widely differing contexts, and Magona is one of the most outstanding examples from South Africa"¹³³. Women had to conquer the phallic pen and write to be able to be given a more powerful voice, which ends up by being a contradiction: women were only listened to when they were capable of controlling and using a male tool.

In Sindiwe Magona's published two autobiographical volumes: - *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* - she tries to convey the idea of authenticity and truth to life, insisting on veracity through expressions such as "that is the naked truth" and "this is how it was"¹³⁴. She wants us to believe she is telling us the exact happenings of her life. Realist writers often used experts to inform the reader about an event, but Magona says "I am not an expert; I am just someone who lived apartheid"¹³⁵. Underneath this aura of simplicity she is claiming that she is not someone who theoretically studied apartheid but someone who lived it, who breathed it and had to endure all the difficulties black people had to go through. Much more important than understanding what apartheid was theoretically is knowing it with one's heart, experiencing it, by way of feeling all those hardships in her own skin. In this register, according to Laura Marcus, "[e]xperience, which in this sense is distinct from the mere registration of facts or states of affairs [...] is the source of worthwhile literary works and the basis of their value"¹³⁶.

Despite the insistence on experiential authority Georg Misch claims that "autobiographies are not to be regarded as objective

narratives”¹³⁷ which goes against the view of Georges Gusdorf for whom “Autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image”¹³⁸. Is autobiography the refraction of one’s image, that is, an unmediated transmission of reality, and if not where is its authority derived from? Magona claims that she is only writing “down what it was like. Not embellished, not changed, just straight forward”¹³⁹. Nonetheless in what can be considered a Realist manner she is hiding all the work that is underneath her writing. Given the need to organise happenings chronologically and choose facts to include in her autobiography, this process required some background work, it is not “just straight forward”. Liz Stanley, in her *The auto/biographical I* says

[t]he writer of auto/biography has, at the ‘moment’ of writing, an active and coherent ‘self’ that the text invokes, constructs and drives towards. Nevertheless there is also textual recognition that ‘the past’ is indeed past and thus essentially unrecoverable- that, in Barthes’ (1975) terms, ‘the self who writes’ no more has direct and unproblematic access to ‘the self who was’¹⁴⁰.

Indeed, this argument also explains Rebecca Chalmers Barton claims that “autobiography has limitations as a vehicle of truth”¹⁴¹. Given that autobiography is about someone’s past, Liz Stanley sums up the situation:

memory actually withholds the key, for we inevitably remember selectively. Memory’s lane is a narrow, twisting and discontinuous route back through the broad plains of the past, leading to a self that by definition we can never remember but only construct through the limited and partial evidence available for us – half-hints of memory, photographs, memorabilia, other people’s remembrances. [...] Because memory

inevitably has limits, the self we construct is necessarily partial; memories ties together events, persons and feelings actually linked only in such accounts and not in life as it was lived; it equally necessarily relies upon fictive devices in producing any and every account of self it is concerned with¹⁴².

We are now facing a problem as the ideology of autobiography is broadly Realist and at the same time fiction is always present when we try to speak or write about our past life. It is obvious that every autobiographer has to fictionalise some moments of his/her life as memory is too imperfect to register everything. We also have to bear in mind that we, personally, change our ways of seeing things through the several stages of our life. Although Sindiwe Magona does not refer to any of these situations, she had to overcome some of those memory failures or tricks by using her imagination to cover the gaps of memory. Moreover, the very structuring of memory is influenced by the strategies and habits of fiction and its tendency to narrativize. This was also a problem for Realist writers which led to the change of their ideology from the “whole truth” to the “illusion” of it.

If we understand that Magona had to fictionalise to write her autobiography how can we see or access the truth underneath the fiction? Is this the right question? Stanley affirms that there is an autobiographical pact between the author and reader in which the author writes confessionally “with his hand on his heart ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’ about his life and self. Thus the reader is assured they are reading an essentially referential account of the autobiographer’s life, one which represents as truthfully as possible that life on paper, for there is an expectation of synonymity between the protagonist, the writer, and the person whose name appears on the title page”¹⁴³. That is, we accept as true what she claims to be truth. As she herself says that what she heard on the buses while working as a

domestic worker “is as valid as any data based on scientific probings; only, much more exciting, much more alive! (TCC,139). It is a truth derived from the authority of the real.

But problems do not end here as ‘autobiographies are cultural autobiographies’¹⁴⁴ (as Bernice Johnson Reagon puts it): an autobiographer is a person who is sexed, aged, belongs to a social class and ethnic positioning, thus, his/her view is necessarily a partial one. Margaret J. Daymond in “Class in the Discourses of Sindiwe Magona’s Autobiography and Fiction” claims that Magona’s discourse often swerves from social class and is instead profoundly affected by gender and race. Magona speaks mainly about black women’s oppression and social class is somewhat forgotten, probably because she climbed the social ladder from its very bottom and despite being unable to forget the days where her main worries were the food for her children and herself her movement to another class suggests that class is not ultimately determinant, in the classic self-made person autobiographical register. As she explains about a fat cheque that was not able to dazzle her “It reminded me of the mean years, out in the cold, when I could not get a teaching position. The legacy of those four years drove roots deep in the core of my soul, left scars that refuse to heal and disappear despite all assurances and all evidence that I am not in want” (FG,43). Magona writes about her life and to a certain degree she speaks for all domestic workers who see themselves obliged to leave their children alone to be able to provide for them. Her principal point of reference however is gender-oriented: “by the time I reached home I had joined the invisible league of women, world-wide – the bearers and nurturers of the human race whom no government or institution recognizes or rewards, and no statistician captures or classifies” (TCC, 175). At the same time her culture is also different and sometimes we see her explain certain aspects of it: “ when you offer something to an older person or to one of much higher rank, in my culture, you use both of your hands. A sign of respect.”(TCC,147).

However, in general her Xhosa background is subsumed in her position as a generically black woman in Apartheid South Africa.

For these reasons we can say that Magona's autobiography is, in Olney's terms, an autophylography as she is not only analysing herself, but black women in general, and more specifically the group of women who had to feed, clothe and educate their children alone without their husbands' help; the group of domestic workers who were not even allowed their own name: Sindiwe saw her name changed to Cindy as it was easier for her employer to pronounce, but when in the United States she would "explain to anyone who looked perplexed at hearing the name for the first time. But I wouldn't tell anyone not to take the trouble to say my name, to use an abbreviation instead. Oh no. I'd done that long enough" (FG, 202). The freedom to assume one's name is central to writing about it.

We can also say it is an autogynography as she also has women as the centre of her text. Women play an extremely important role in her life. As a matter of fact men are almost non-existent except for her father, her husband and some of her employers and of course the butcher who sold her sheep heads on credit and the milkman, about whom, until this day, she is unable to imagine how he was able to maintain his job with all he had done to help.

In both volumes of autobiography it is women that she can really lean on. Aunt Dathini is the first woman who really came to rescue her and give her strength: "Dad'o Bawo (aunt on father's side) may have come late into my life, but of my blood relatives she is the one I know the most. I know more of her than of my mother for she has shown me so much of herself" (TCC, 155/156). It was this aunt who was able to get her a job; as a domestic worker. Later on, Magona, while reflecting about the importance of her aunt says: "[a]nd through them (the conversations they had), she taught me, more than any other had, so much about life and living" (TCC, 160). It is common to read that

somebody “came to my rescue” (FG, 28). The neighbour she is referring to here is sis’ Thandi who helps her to get a job: “I’ve come to take this girl back to where she belongs” (FG, 30). Then again (as referred to before): “another woman came to the rescue” to lend her some clothes and shoes so that she would look presentable to her new teaching job (FG, 34).

In 1967, six years after leaving her teacher-training college, having married and become a mother of three children sans husband she meets another woman, Maggie Makhoba, who had been a student of Magona and who had been influenced by her to continue her studies and take matric. It is then that she decides it is time for her to lend a hand to others in need and join the National Council of African Women. However, she keeps failing to believe in her own capacity “[p]erhaps it had not occurred to me that I had anything to offer” (FG, 81). The South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) helped Magona to regain some trust in herself and it is here that she is able to join for the first time with people who were classified as Bantu as well as those not belonging to that classification. It is because of this contact and the friendship that arises that her father, before passing away says: “[y]ou have been blessed, my daughter. You are very wealthy. [...] Look at your friends. There is everybody in your group of friends” (FG, 103). With these words she regains her father’s trust and appreciation. He is, once more, proud of her. SACHED is so good for her that she describes it as “a true alloy, a mini melting pot, It represented an ethnic amalgam, bringing together differently classified people who would not otherwise have met” (FG, 106). These women play an essential role in Magona’s life. The self she creates in her autobiography is therefore, as Friedman points out, “not built as an ‘isolated being’, not against others but with others in an ‘interdependent existence’.”¹⁴⁵

She also explains that this nest of relationships and this intricate interdependence is common in her culture: “The intricate ways in which relationships are drawn among us make it almost impossible for an

individual to be destitute in the sense of having connections with no living soul. One could, conceivably, be minus parent, or issue; have neither spouse nor sibling; but to be alone, with no relative, no one to care for or to lean on, is virtually unheard of.” (TCC, 3).

Autobiography, then serves as a process of self-discovery itself and not simply as a record of events. While writing Magona finds out things she had forgotten and that only come to her mind while writing: “Writing now, remembering the time of these episodes, reminds me of another that happened to me” (FG, 115). Writing makes her reflect upon her life and she remembers things she does not believe in now: she would not marry her husband and give him total powers over her, she would not leave her family in Cape Town in such a light hearted way as it was there that she was happy. It is in her first volume of autobiography where she tells us of her childhood years, how happy she was, how loved she felt and especially her sense of belonging. We are inclined to believe that she felt that way not only because she was in a smaller village where everyone was helping and knew each other but also because she was a child and she did not exactly understand the hardships her parents were going through. Sindiwe Magona seems to have realised this as an adult and because of this her text is full of subtle ironies. As a child we can understand how excited she felt over moving:

we were excited by the very thought of travelling, of going, of going away, far away, somewhere, anywhere. No jetsetter ever felt more important, no astronaut more adventurous. For weeks preceding this unexpected event we, in our new and elevated status, in the eyes of our mates, received a lot of advice on our to win up our affairs in the village (TCC, 16-17).

Her imaginative and fantasised image of Cape Town reveals a child-like innocence: “where everyone ate meat everyday and did not have to wait until there was a feast or one of the cattle was dying or dead before they could have meat. What fool would take a rag doll to such a place?” (TCC, 18). For the child Magona “The Promise of Cape Town” was a big step climbing the social ladder (FG, 18). The children were becoming more important than their friends, they were going to have the chance to move to a far greater, better position than that they had living in Gungululu. Nevertheless we also have the adult Magona who while writing, and all through her life, has acquired a different vision of things. This departure meant not seeing most of her friends or even her own family anymore:

There were no tears at parting, for we did not fully understand the meaning of the event; we did not realize we might never again see most of those dear ones we were living behind: my maternal grandfather would die without my ever seeing him again. Father's father, we would see once more because he would come to Cape Town, almost three decades later, to bury his son. [...] We had no way of knowing the tremendous financial sacrifice father was making in coming to take us to be near his place of employment (TCC, 18).

Of course the child Magona, even with all her innocence, cannot fail to notice the difficulties of this new life and her expectations about Cape Town are soon shaken. One week after they have settled there she experiences and witnesses her first liquor raid and we realise that although she does not say a word she starts to understand her parents' suffering: “[e]xcept for the thundering of my own heart, not a word had passed between us during the presents of the police. Not a word was spoken after they had left. Knowledge I would hide, for years even from myself, became mine that night: Father's eyes also could house fear”

(TCC, 20). But as a child this incident still did not dethrone her entire expectations of a new life: “[d]espite the glaring gap between the expectations I had harboured and the far from swanky reality that was my new life, the bubble didn’t burst. The belief that our situation had improved tremendously persisted despite very strong evidence to the contrary” (TCC, 23).

This journey of self discovery also involves discovering others. One of the most striking instances of this is the first time she saw white people:

Fascinated, I look. Whirling thoughts arrested to detail. Yes. It is true! *Abelungu* do have eyes coloured like those of cats. [...] The passengers stare. We stare right back. Both curious. We awed, admiring, scared and confused. And, in an unformed way, knowing that we were a motif in something bigger, powerful, and all pervasive: understanding and not knowing. Not knowing but understanding. We – Them (TCC, 11).

In this episode she is not able to retain her child’s perspective as we see the child Magona astonished by whites but then comments that the coins that they received in exchange were most of the time worthless. Implicitly the adult is being ironic about the situation as nothing good could come from these goddish whites who were used to taking advantage even of small and innocent children.

Magona afterwards refers to a difficulty she now has but which had not been the case in the past. She says she has difficulty in communicating to whites; “the logic of a child facilitated what now, as an adult, I find excruciatingly difficult; communication” (TCC, 12)- this seems surprising as Magona “now” is used to being with whites. While writing she is in the United Nations in New York City and has certainly

learned that whites are not so superior as she had seen. By “now” she realises her judgement of white women was not correct:

As I've said, pain and being white had never connected in my mind. After joining CWC I was to learn of white hurt: childlessness, marital infidelity, problem children, health problems, alcoholism, divorce, loss of faith, guilt about the situation in the country, fear for sons reaching the age when the military would call them up to serve their country, debt, and a host of others.

Okay, so some of these problems were different from those plaguing the women of my world or, where similar, the emphasis was different.[...] But was their pain any less? I couldn't say. Not when I got to the harsh, brutal question: How does one measure pain? (FG,133).

She seems to be talking and explaining white people's pain to somebody else. She does not want her great grandchildren to have a stereotyped image of these or other people without giving them an opportunity. However she had white women in her group of friends, how can she say she has excruciating difficulty in communicating with whites? It could simply be her lack of confidence or an indication of one more ironic function her autobiographies possess, that of speaking to white people (who constitute the majority of her readers) in their (written) language. Although she proves to be a deserving daughter, a good parent who is able to provide and educate her children alone and a responsible member of society who is involved in several women's movements, she still feels incapable. She finds it amazing that some people find her interesting as a friend and a bit later she confesses she would not be able to do University studies as “[o]thers had better brains, obviously” (FG, 107).

Magona all through her autobiography shows a lack of confidence in herself that seems sometimes exaggerated: once, while at SACHED, she is stopped by a security guard who humiliates her in front of everyone and her own son Sandile because she is thought to have stolen something . At first she is capable of reacting but belief in herself seems to be missing and we are faced with “a twinge of doubt unseated my confidence. Right out of nowhere, it came, attached its tentacles onto my guts, sucking and gnawing. My sense of innocence took flight, deserting me. What, I asked myself, if unbeknown to me, someone had planted stolen property in my bag?” (FG, 116) and when asked to join Church Women Concerned she claims “I even believed she (Grace Qunta) had not thought me good enough” (FG, 123).

While at SACHED she become involved with Church Women Concerned in the second half of 1973 which as she says “marked a turning point in my life” (FG, 122). There she interacts with women with a different skin colour and belonging to a different faith, but now she is able to see them as people: “in this group I met women who were white- not white women. I met women who were classified coloured- not coloured women. I met women of Indian descent. For the first time in my life, in my thirtieth year, I encountered people- yes, with different colour skin, but they were people first. They spoke with me, person to person. We shared ourselves. They listened to what I had to say. I, in turn, heard what they said” (FG, 122). It is important to remember that people classified Bantu (Magona) were not supposed to have relationships with other classifications. It was forbidden by law. Nevertheless, “CWC provided a means of correcting that deficiency” (FG, 122). We are faced with an enormous evolution from when she was a child who had felt *Abelungu* (whites) to be different: “ Not knowing but understanding. We- Them” (TCC,11)- the Other. We must analyse this in a social perspective as it was the State’s Education policies that led black women to think they were only good for “women’s work”. Moreover black patriarchal values reinforced this. As a girl she wasn’t allowed by her father to go out or meet anyone although

“Jongi could go, one Saturday per month, to see a film *if* all his chores were done *and* his school work didn’t suffer, *and* he went to church the next morning. To me, this was less an example of the magnanimity of my loving parents than it was, yet again, a sign of how everyone favoured Jongi. I wasn’t even allowed to join the Girl Guides. And all because I was a girl” (TCC, 74).

All through her life she will be devalued socially for being a black woman, a married woman who is bringing up three young children alone. Her situation is extremely unjust as despite being the only source of income in her home, she did not apply as a breadwinner according to the law of Apartheid (see FG, 45), so she can not have a permanent job or apply for a house. Besides all the pain she has to endure, she is even criticised by her colleagues as they do not understand the injustice of the difference between their monthly pay (see FG, 68). And she confronts them:

‘Do you realise we have the same discrimination right here in the school?’ I asked. ‘When we passed the matric exams’, I continued failing to notice the mercury was zooming down with alarming speed, ‘my salary went up by five rand a month. You, Stanford, and you, Lucas, got twice that amount [...]’ ‘No, Sindi! I am a man. I have a wife. I am a breadwinner’.

Pardon me! I had only three children to feed and clothe. And that I was doing solo. But, obviously, to these men, some of whom were yet to marry (never mind have children) I did not qualify as a breadwinner. (FG, 68)

All through *Forced to Grow* we feel the weight of her being a husbandless woman with three children. She carries the burden of being “a woman of dubious repute” (FG, 42) and “idizaki” (FG, 1). She

finds that there are no words to describe her situation and her helplessness, and all of the words she has generated in her condition have failed to come up with certain key terms. Realism doesn't mean the easy narration of events but a more crucial construction of the language we need to deliver them. As Magona explains:

It seemed a little unfair, if not downright unjust, that it was I, left to fend for myself and three young children who had somehow lost society's esteem. I knew then no equivalent term for a man. More than twenty years later, not only have I not discovered it in Xhosa, it has eluded me in the three other languages I speak (FG, 2).

Unsurprisingly she stresses the specificity of her situation being worse because of her sex. If she had been a man things would have been a lot easier. Throughout her life she realises that besides the fact of having to raise her three children all alone (without a husband), she is also penalised by the law at every turn: "Her harsh reality dampened. [...] Because I was a married woman I was condemned to a temporary post. And so at the end of each school year I, and other married women like me, became jobless and had to reapply for our positions amid stiff competition" (FG, 52). We may think that she was safe, protected and sheltered in her neighbourhood, back with her people who suffered the same as her but that does not happen: "In the African tradition life is celebrated and children are treasured. It is ironic that women, the bearers of these national treasures are at one and the same time praised for bringing forth babies and devalued for that very act. A woman is an old hag as soon as she has had a child" (FG, 20). Later on in this same book she claims. "No greater sin can a woman commit than having children. That is the lesson I was learning [...]. It was common practice for women to hide the fact of their motherhood" (FG, 79). If we join these and many other references about motherhood in these autobiographical works we get the sense that being a mother

is a setback in her life, a burden that is delaying her projects. It is a responsibility that does not allow her the time and opportunity she needs to escape destitution and poverty and therefore to provide better for the children. Even her own mother agrees with Magona's perception of her inadequacies “ ‘you, Sindi, my child, God just gave you not one but three children. You are totally without motherly kindness’. My children agree with Mother's assertion” (FG, 95). With social mores trying to convince her that she was a woman of dubious repute, who should not have disobeyed the traditional customs, and that she has offended her parents and above all had three children she did not plan and who are undermining her progress she inflicts strict discipline on her children, which included corporal punishment. She wants to prove to society, herself and mainly her parents that she can raise well-behaved children who will not put themselves in jeopardy as she has done to herself, attempting thus to make sure they will never embarrass her the way she has done her parents.

The Education system also reinforces the inner lack of confidence felt by Magona, when after 1955, it forbade White, African, Coloured and Indian pupils to attend the same school and as a consequence different departments of education were created for different races. Ironically stated is the fact that the government “protected” African Children: “The law stipulates that African children start school only after the seventh birthday. White and coloured children my age, under no such ‘protection’, were beginning their third year of schooling.” (TCC, 48). Magona reserves some of her harshest criticism of the regime when she discusses education, a system in which 480 rand were spent on each child and only 28 rand on each African child. At least, she ironizes, the government has indeed educated her for it taught her “not to complain, and not to expect help from any source- least of all the government” (FG, 18). Education, in fact, becomes the black African's responsibility, and not simply with respect to the traditional educational subjects but with respect to strategies for the survival of families. This educational responsibility continues in the present as Magona realises

she has a duty to fulfil: she has to register the way she and her people lived, so that her children and those who come after know who they are. Sindiwe Magona starts her autobiography especially directed to “My Children’s Children” – that is to her grandchildren. In a more generalised focus it could be said she is writing not only for her following generations but for all the Xhosa families and even other people all around the world who will lose touch with the oral tradition, which, as she says “is playing less and less a role in our lives”¹⁴⁶.

Apartheid was a cynical system in wrecking African families and one of the results of this forced disunion was that communal traditions would be lost, so that even with the end of apartheid Magona needs to register her life as it used to be. Magona herself recognises this in an interview with David Attwell where she says:

I wanted to write about my life, an ordinary life, by any means of looking at it. I thought to myself, South Africa will change one day, and then there will come people who will not know what it was to be just an ordinary African woman, or African little girl, during the time of apartheid. I didn’t think apartheid would disappear during my lifetime. But I had all confidence that in due time it would disappear. And therefore, I wrote really for the future. I wrote thinking that three generations, six generations, who knows, down the line people might want to look back and say, ‘Yes, we understand, but what was it like?’¹⁴⁷

Her autobiography is initiated with an apparent dialogue. She is talking to her great-granddaughter and we get the feeling that this grandmother is going to tell us the story of her life. We seem to be listening to her around her chair. She claims to be writing so that the next generations will relate to their past and realise who they are: “How

will you know who you are if I do not or cannot tell you the story of your past?"(TCC, preface). So this seems to be the purpose of her autobiography, to tell her own story as representing the past of the stories of other people who were yet to come.

It is interesting to notice that although the Xhosa do not have a written tradition it is through the written word that many traditions will be helped to endure. This relates to Dorothy Driver's perception that women must displace themselves to write. They have to control a hitherto male tool to be able to recuperate their voice. Driver calls our attention to the fact that:

There are various implications for literary criticism of a binary division between culture and nature, where men are identified with culture and women with nature. Since women are associated with nature, they are seen as the bearers of such qualities as sentiment and feeling, expressiveness and spontaneity, emotion and affection, generosity and altruism, self-sacrifice and self-denial; that is, those features associated with the nurturing function of mothers and the maternal instinct. And alongside these qualities exist others: passivity for example, and dependence, timidity and vulnerability. Such associations may become self-fulfilling prophecies for women. [...] Thus if women write, they too must displace and control nature, see it as 'other', which will complicate a woman's sense of her ('natural') identity and role.¹⁴⁸

Although the precise point of this feminist perspective on writing is not an important issue for Magona, she herself agreed with the traditional vision of women as being more sentimental, more affectionate, than men and men being more directed to discipline, order

and education. Magona, in some moments of her life, looking at her deviant behaviour as a mother, recategorised this behaviour as male, rather than perceiving that the original categories should be rethought. She claims that her “children never had a mother. I was too busy being their father. I worked at more than one job at any given time”(FG, 100). Her life never allowed her the time to spend with her children, to nurture and exchange caresses with them as a mother would do but the most important issue here is that besides this lack of time she was afraid of spoiling her children: “ ‘you are not going to run wild. People expect you to because you are being raised with no father’ ” (FG, 100-101). Furthermore she herself compares her behaviour with that of a father: “ ‘well, what would a father do for you that I do not do? I pay rent, buy food, clothes and school uniforms; I pay school fees and doctor’s fees when you’re not well’. The list was long, the drilling hard” (FG, 101) and

I was so busy being the breadwinner that I know now my children never had a mother. I was the head of the family. Their well-being depended on me. I worked. I dished out discipline. I created a place where they would grow up well mannered, purposeful. I was father to my children. I shunned those things mothers do, cooing over their children, providing them with the gentler side of parenting; I deliberately suppressed things like these. They petrified me no end. I believed if I showed the children tenderness they would get spoiled as there was no father to counteract with stern discipline. I was bent on raising children who would defy the stereotype of children raised by *idikazi*, a woman alone, a woman considered by consequence of that fact alone as morally bankrupt. No, my children never had a mother. In me they had a father. (FG, 47-48)

Margaret J. Daymond affirms that “Magona moves from a woman’s well defined traditional domesticity to an urban multiplicity of roles that are felt to be contradictory. Magona often remarks that she has been more of a father than a mother to her children”¹⁴⁹. It is not a contradiction, I believe, for Magona is simply attached to the role of mother as nurturer and father as discipliner and provider maintaining a view based on the strict division of what a mother and a father should be. Instead of reconstructing her notion of motherhood, she adopts the role of the father. Indeed, the fact of writing *Father* and *Mother* always with a capital letter (when referring to her own parents) appears connected with those well structured and positional roles. The expression “urban multiplicity of roles” can only be applied in terms of a vision of gender roles which keeps narrow the range of roles that any one gender can occupy. Within her own family she mimics the unjust system of oppressor/oppressed she so widely criticises. Bhabha, as referred to above claims that it is possible for the subaltern to speak but for that he/ she has to undermine the patriarchal/ coloniser’s authority by using mimicry and parody. And Magona to some extent adopts both as she mimics the role of the father, concerning her children (assuming, here, the role of the oppressor) and uses irony frequently when speaking about the government policies or her lack of confidence in her own skills. Contradictorily, Magona discovers, that deep down, she had never lost faith in herself. She often remarks on her incapacity to do things but at the same time tries, dares and demonstrates that a woman is capable of accomplishing her aims despite the disadvantages she was subject to.

These two volumes of autobiography thus give the impression of serving the purpose of not just inter-generational but personal therapy. To make the ghosts of her past disappear: when leaving for the United States she thought her so called “husband” had the right to say goodbye to his children:

“Seventeen years before when he left me I had vowed, ‘I’ll show him.’ Now, *another me* looked at him. I beheld the man who had forsaken me all those many years ago, the man who had refused to answer pointed questions I’d hurled his way. I looked at him, and I found that the need to gloat had forsaken me. Without my ever taking a conscious decision, I had let go even of my anger towards him. I had long forgiven him. I’d just not know that I had. Indeed, when I think about it at all, my husband’s leaving me was a lucky break. Of course, I didn’t quite see it that way at the time. He was such a perfect picture of government design. Forty-three years old. And that was his sole achievement” (FG,227/228. My italics.)

Magona needs to register, not only her suffering with her husband but the fact that she had progressed on from simple bitterness. The practical result of working through her feelings about her husband are necessary for her to be able to move on to a new stage in her life. The different selves that she refers to are compounded by there being another self as well- the self who is writing the book.

This means that everything she focuses on is recalibrated through the eyes of this recording, later self. Just as Magona discovered that she had rethought the position of others who helped or hindered her in her life, she discovered that even the perception she had of her mother is the object of reformulation. She starts her autobiography by referring to her mother as an obedient wife but later realises she was proud of her mother’s achievements: “ I certainly have come a long way from the false sense of shame I used to harbour. I am proud of Mother, for she has travelled very far in her life’s journey.” (FG, 76). Magona is not only referring to her mother but to all similar women, who, underneath society’s oppression, are the ones who keep it working. It was on

women's shoulders that all the responsibilities (family, children, neighbourhood) rested as their husbands went out to work and came home very rarely. They were the ones who had to endure the everyday hardships, and as David Callahan suggests:

Magona is crucially interested in the role of women as carers, those who are left with the children, those whose heroism is practical, pragmatic and concerned with the daily survival and not with the macho heroics of armed struggle. The notion of what control a black woman can ever have in such a world absorbs her. Especially as in the world of work that concerns her, black women are usually the most disempowered. Despite this lack of power it was actually women who had the role of maintaining the family and by extension the community and thus implicitly a whole people's sense of self at a time when it was supposedly that self that was being fought for.¹⁵⁰

What about men? As we have seen women are central and essential in her existence while men are problematic at best. Can we call her a feminist?

If a feminist wants women to be treated with respect, to be regarded as equals by men, even by men with whom they are in partnership: yes, Then I am a feminist. If a feminist thinks women should earn the same amount for the same job: yes, I am a Feminist. I really don't believe women are inferior.

African tradition and the law in South Africa-apartheid as well as tradition- put this double burden on me as an African woman. I have always felt this yoke very badly and have been very upset that

African men wouldn't see my burden and would always say: 'Oh, that's divisive. We must first fight for the liberation of the race.' At no point does it make any difference to me whether I am earning a lower salary as a teacher because I am black or because I am female: both hurt! I am earning a lower salary. Apartheid was such an intricate thing: as a single parent I could never apply for a house to live in with my children, and the African men wouldn't see my handicap. It's only the wearer of the shoe who can know where it pinches¹⁵¹.

In a culture where women are devalued for having children and contradictorily where children are praised Magona, herself, assumes a contradiction: she wished to be rescued from motherhood and presents the story of her people in the voice of someone who is, in the present, still a fictional great-grandmother. That is, both for herself and her people's culture motherhood assumes opposing roles. Magona often remarks that being a mother is a setback in her life but welcomes the idea of continuity it contains when it comes to the need to preserve her cultural identity. In her culture children are welcomed and praised but regularly women hide the fact that they are mothers: "In the African tradition life is celebrated and children are treasured. It is ironic that women, the bearers of these national treasures, are at one and the same time praised for bringing forth babies and devalued for that very act." (FG, 20). At the same time "No greater sin can a woman commit than having children. [...] It was common practice for women to hide the fact of their motherhood." (FG, 79). This chapter of Magona's life is concluded by giving her ancestors the responsibility for her life as if it was they who controlled it all along : "There is a reason why the ancestors have seen fit that I dwell among strangers for a while. But I remain ever of the African soil:"(FG, 230).

It is in these ironies and contradictions and yet insistent concentration on the need never to let things become so unfair as they were for her that we find Magona's rich representation of herself and her tribulations as, to some extent, representative, in the manner of the autobiographies of oppressed people everywhere. While Realists would never admit that their memory was failing or expressing opinions or thoughts that the reader might consider contradictory, autobiographers not only recognise such contradictions but use them to build and expose the evolution of the self. These contradictions are the true composition of every human being: they enrich it and make it closer to the real.

Chapter V- Realist techniques in *To My Children's Children* and
Forced to Grow

Magona presents herself as “people of our sort”¹⁵²: she never sees herself as an extraordinary or exceptional human being and we can, most of the time, understand what led her to behave in such a manner. Although, as we have seen, she has gone through many hardships and has been, along with her children, in a place of total destitution “her principal concern is not to indict the system or to claim that she was so oppressed she possessed no options. The systemic oppression of apartheid, or the gendered unconcern of husbands for their wives’ problems when they are away, are rightly scorned but they do not become the sum of Magona’s being¹⁵³.” – as David Callahan explains. In fact, her point is to show that, like herself, many other women can try, dare and improve themselves.

As Realist writers do she also claims she wrote exactly the way it was, she did not work on her text as it was “just straight forward”, but we have also seen above that writing is not so simple. What these writers did was to disguise their sometimes painful and hard work on their texts in an aura of naturalness and simplicity (which facilitated reading and its understanding).

Many African women can see in Magona’s life the portrait of at least some aspects of their own life, experience, wishes and expectations. In Magona’s meetings with Church Women Concern (CWC) and SACHED, she further realised that both black and white women shared experiences especially as a consequence of their patriarchal oppression. As David Callahan explains about Magona’s short stories “They constitute a frieze (or a sisterhood), a series of representations that in this way do not become depictions of individual cases but representative of the situation of many black South African women whose families live in the townships or the country while they work apart from them as domestic workers in the city.” ¹⁵⁴

Until her experience with SACHED and Church Women Concerned Magona had thought whites had everything they wanted,

had better salaries, had access to books all through their lives, good houses, special places on buses, not to mention residential areas for “whites only”. This made the impact of CWC greater. “White people in South Africa regard themselves as superior. The social environment reinforces that. The law upholds it. Racism is accepted. It is the traditional way of life, perfectly normal” (FG, 90-91). It is because of this that she confesses “until I become a member of CWC, I had thought rarely of white people. And on the rare occasion my mind would occupy itself with such a gainless exercise, the thoughts were seldom complimentary. Whites were happy. They were carefree. They were spoilt. They were rich. They had everything” (FG, 126). Pain, hurt and suffering were words she would never attach to whites. Their world was seen as a paradise but after meeting these women she realised white women also had problems and knew what pain was.

Sara Mills, referred to above, outlined four characteristics of Realist texts which can be observed in Magona’s autobiographical texts: the first one is the text’s anti-theoretical nature and Magona refers to this several times: she usually affirms she is telling happenings exactly the way they occurred and refers to the stories of domestic workers as being as valid as any scientific probing but much more authentic. The second point highlighted by Mills is the close connection between female characters and ordinary women’s experience which has already been explained above. The third and fourth elements cannot be directly observed but we can understand them as they are one of the main traits of autobiography: the concern with the author who is most of the time identified as the main character and the pleasure of reading in search for role models who can teach new ways of dealing with the same problems. Magona is not only worried about writing the story of her life for future generations but also worries about present-day women’s status in South Africa. She wants women to fight for their rights along with the Xhosa people as a whole. Magona’s autobiography belongs to a literary tradition of women that Sara Mills defines as a “consciousness-raising process [...] designed to help women to use

literature as a means of gaining some insight into their own lives, and into seeing the ways in which patriarchy limits women's possibilities"¹⁵⁵. Such writing can help women to overcome social censure against "correct behaviour for women with children [...] [and] [m]others [...] [who] had no business being anything else" (FG, 79). Her conviction that a woman is more than just a mother plays a crucial part in her work. When she divorces herself from her husband in her heart she says she felt she "had joined the invisible league of women, world-wide – the bearers and nurturers of the human race " (FG, 175). Throughout her autobiography the reader witnesses Magona's internal conflict with the issue of motherhood and by the end of the autobiography her words convey an image of an essentialist motherhood that seems to engulf the concept of womanhood as well and which is a contradiction with her own arguments. If one thinks of her autobiography as a journey for self-knowledge, then by the end of it Magona arrives at a place of dubious security from a feminist point of view. Such ambiguities, however, are the material of a truthful autobiography.

Her autobiography is also enriched as she often uses irony and mimicry to expose the way South African Government segregated her people "Government legislation and government policy, relentless in its efforts to destroy the African people, would not promote social services that might benefit Africans. For that would be counterproductive". (FG p.92) "The government has never, not once, disappointed me. It has been singularly consistent in its persecution of the African, attacking the very foundation of our people – the family – robbing our young of a fighting chance to life, to dreams rightfully their both as members of the human race and as citizens of the twentieth century." (FG p.19) Irony is used commonly to reveal all the anger and resentment that she feels: as in, for instance: "I do know royal whiteness" (TCC, 73), "The worst was that we were burdened with 'protection' " (TCC, 1), " 'And a white skin.' Why had these same advertisements not included the one criterion that was crucial in getting a job? Even a cursory glance

through the classified section of the newspapers would have told me that a white skin was what I needed most” (FG, 46).

As we have seen in the first part of this thesis, autobiography writing engages with problems like the difficulties of self-knowledge and we are led to believe that this is the reason why Magona sometimes speaks as a child and other times as the adult Magona while writing, that is she changes the focaliser of her story when she finds it necessary. The episode of moving to Cape Town is one of these examples as it is the child who is telling what happened but the adult is going to contaminate it by ironising the situation, as “the promise of Cape town” was the promise of even harsher conditions. Magona could not avoid commenting also when she met whites for the first time and these whites offered them some worthless coins in exchange for goods. It was the Child Magona who was astonished by the Abelungu but it was the adult who affirms “...ha’pennies, and a few, even, ‘the money with birds’- farthings, worthless” (TCC, 12). The problem of truth relates to the difficulties felt by Realists but Magona claims not to be writing “The Truth” but “her truth”, her reactions, her feelings at that moment. She even says some of her written works were “the outpourings of a soul in hell” (FG, 187). In fact, Magona’s main worry, as with most Realist writers, is not what people will think of her story as she asserts: “My feelings, my truth, that was all that concerned me.” (FG, 183).

Tricks of memory are also a common dilemma for autobiography writers as we have seen previously with bell hooks. Magona is also aware of this and says: “At Chez Leon (or was it Au Caleau D’Egmont?) my palate was delighted with [...] (FG, 143) or in *To My Children’s Children* she is doubtful about the schedules at Lourdes high school she attended and says: “My memory may be playing tricks on me, but I seem to recall that the day in this institution did not begin at crack of dawn” (TCC, 78), but then using irony, once more, she explains as if her memory has become clearer: “It began before: at four o’clock, to be

precise” (TCC, 78). At other times she is not embarrassed by her lack of memory, speaking unashamedly about Erlin Ibreck’s help for example. When she arrived in the United States: “She had helped me open a bank account, find accommodation, unpack some of the things I would need during the day, shown me round International House, and helped me in a host of other ways that *now escape my memory*” (FG, 203) [my italics] or “*I can’t recall now* when I had come to the conclusion that the fate of... “ (FG, 204) [my italics], or even “*if my memory serves me correctly*, there were eight teachers, including the principal, at Moshesh Higher Primary School” (FG, 40. My italics).

She is conscious of these slips of memory and reveals them to us: “After an hour or so (which probably was far less in reality, but such was my apprehension that it seemed a very long time) had passed between [...] (TCC, 45), or even when she speaks about the huts’ names: “Ethekwini (in Durban), uXande (the pantry), eNdlin’enkulu (in the Big Hut), are the only names I remember, although I am convinced there were more [...] (TCC, 13). Using these doubts she makes the reader think about him/herself: every person has had some moment in his/her life when time seemed to fly and others when minutes were felt as though hours or weeks. This lack of memory also happens when “Thokozile, a year and eight months, was fobbed off with a dress of sky-blue with white trim whose origins I no longer recall” (FG, 10). Explaining some of her childhood events is also difficult. “I am at a loss now to explain this” (TCC, 31). Occasionally she leaves these slips of memory aside and in an ellipsis of information she simply says: “In the late afternoon of 24 December 1966, *someone must have come to pay a sizeable debt*. I suddenly found myself flush. I had an extra two rand” (FG, 9. My italics). Who? Why? These might be our questions but she does not answer them because the important aspect of the situation was that she was able to buy Thembeke her very first Christmas dress. That is, Magona uses these techniques to give her text more veracity

and truthfulness. The absence of precise information is no barrier to writing what she does know.

Let us consider the death of Magona's Aunt Antana in the "year 1974 or thereabouts" (TCC, 64). She claims her mother received the news with a shock and believed the hospital staff had killed her dear sister:

They waited just until my back was turned, and then the filthy witches did their dirty deed. But, God is there,' she comforts herself.

These are words said today, three decades after the sad event, said with a cold, white fury, a fury, a fury filled with the conviction of a God-ordained vengeance that Mother knows awaits (TCC, 65).

Well, thirty years after 1974 takes us to 2004 and we know Magona ends her autobiographical work in 1984 (it is the last chronological reference found) and published it in 1992. This specific instance contains a chronological error which might be intended. Departing from what appears to be a realistic detail, she suggests instead that her mother's pain will prevail for long years to come, probably even until the end of her life.

Attempting to describe Magona's work by referring to the many theorists of Realism can, however, become somewhat confusing. Accordingly, as there is no unanimity about the elements of Realism, I will focus on the synthesis of Realist characteristics presented by Philippe Hamon.

1- The first characteristic displayed by Hamon is the **flash-back, memory or summary**.

Magona uses flashbacks, for instance at the beginning of *Forced to Grow* as she starts in 1967 and a bit further on tells us what had happened to her in 1966: “In my memory, [...]the year 1967 wears a yellow. Not too bright a yellow. The second half of 1966 had been an abysmal hole of hopelessness.” (FG 1-3). But she goes further back as some pages later she tells us of the beginning of her teaching career: “[i]t was there in Guguletu that a starry-eyed nineteen-year-old me began teaching. In 1962, ...” (FG, 14).

Using memory is obviously one of the essential elements needed to be able to write an autobiography as it speaks about past events which were necessarily recorded in memory. The introduction of the family is also done so that we can understand her actions and feelings at that time as well as later on while an adult looking back to her childhood.

The use of summary is also present, with one of the most important ones being the brief account of her life in a year: “A young wife, an expectant mother. No longer employed. I was a housewife. Less than a year after leaving St Matthew’s with a certainty, at least in my own mind, that a splendid career was beckoning, I was a housewife. Nothing more. Nothing less” (FG, 110).

When she starts working as a domestic worker, she announces, right from the beginning it was a job that would last four years during which she was “ ‘a part of’ four households” (TCC, 118), or even when she says “I began teaching in April 1962, but I had to leave the profession six months later, pregnant. The next four years saw me get married, have two more children, work as domestic servant, and lose a husband” (FG, 15). With these quotations we have both the summary, flashback and a hurried text that wants to achieve its end, which all comprise part of the list of realistic elements as outlined by Hamon.

2- The second point highlighted by Hamon is **psychological motivation of characters** which as a consequence is the justification of the narrative.

The justification of the narrative is made right at the opening of these two autobiographical books:

Child of the Child of My Child.

As ours is an oral tradition I would like you to hear from my own lips what it was like living in the 1940s onwards. What it was like in the times of your great-grandmother, me.

However, my people no longer live long lives. Generations no longer set eyes on one another. Therefore, I fear I may not live long enough to do my duty to you, to let you know who you are and whence you are (TCC, 1).

As I have referred to before, Magona wrote these two volumes to register for future generations what it was like in her time, how the AmaXhosa culture was and how that explained who her great grandchildren are, where had they got to, where they are or will be and that they should avoid losing their oral tradition which was at risk of being lost. These two autobiographical books compose a story that an amaXhosa grandmother is telling to the child of the child of her child about the happenings of her own life:

Perhaps, for now, that is the only way I can fulfil my duty to you, my child. The only way I can tell you: this is how it was, in the days of your forebears.

Therefore, forget that I am sitting on a four-legged chair instead of a goatskin or a grass mat. Forget that we meet through your eyes instead of

your ears. Listen, for my spirit, if not my flesh, is there with you.' (FG, 231-232).

Magona has also a pedagogical intention, she wants to show firstly to her grandchildren and then to her readers how they can fight against life's difficulties. She represents a role model that can be mimicked to achieve success.

3- **Intertextuality** is the third element where **historical and geographical proper names** function as landmarks which emphasises the reality effect the author wanted to achieve.

The landmarks, or factual names of people or regions are also used to authenticate her work.

Historical facts are also included: "A year later, 1948, the Boers came into power" (TCC, 16). While studying Standard two we are informed about the names of Stations on the Suburban Line from Cape Town to Simonstown: "Cape Town, Woodstock, Salt River, Observatory ... " (TCC, 50). About Education, historical information is more abundant which is understandable as she tells us the story of her childhood and then all her journeys through the education system not only as a student but also as a teacher. As an example, among many, we have:

"The year I left Primary school was the year that education became racially segregated. Hitherto, white pupils, African pupils, coloured pupils, and Indian pupils could theoretically, attend the same school. Indeed, there were cases of African pupils attending coloured or white schools. After 1955, the law forbade that practice. Henceforth there would be different Departments of Education for the different race groups. Understandably, the examinations set would not be the same since the examining bodies would be different" (TCC,65).

The historical moments that affected her or her professional colleagues are occasionally referred to: “[p]rotesting against the Bantu Education Act of 1954, many teachers were fired. Others were arrested. Some left the country, going to the newly independent African states....” (TCC, 65), but historical references which affected black people in general are also common “South Africa held a referendum in 1961 to decide whether or not the country should continue its ties with Great Britain and remain within the commonwealth. The English element of the white South African populace favoured keeping this ‘connection’ whilst the Afrikaner element was for breaking ties with England. No one saw any need to consult people of colour. The Afrikaner won the day; South Africa became a republic” (TCC, 87), or the ridicule she aims at the difference of money spent by government on education “At that time the government subsidized education to the tune of R480 for a white child and R28 for an African child. It *has not burdened* the African child with compulsory education (the currency changed from pounds sterling to rands and cents in 1961, at which time the pound was equivalent to two rands)” (TCC, 99-100. My italics).

Cultural characteristics are not left out and, she, from the beginning of her autobiographical works is careful with such aspects: “Mama called both women mama, for that is the custom among amaXhosa” (TCC, 4). Historical and geographical proper names inhabit these autobiographical texts, such as for instance: “we lived in Gungululu, where I was born. Gungululu is village about eighteen km from Umtata, a little town in the then Cape Province of the Union of South Africa. Born just before the end of the Second World War, when South Africa was still a British colony, at birth I was, therefore, a South African Citizen.” (TCC, 3), or “I have very fond memories of our home at Solomon’s (for that was the name of that part of Blaauvlei)” (TCC, 23).

4- The fourth element is related to the previous one is the text’s readability using **names, surnames and names of places or streets** continually, **which helps the visualisation of characters or places**.

I can still see the location, Blaauvlei. The best picture I have to this day, and one I can recall with remarkable facility, is the view from the hill: I am coming from school. Up Boundary Road, running. At the foot of the hill the tarred road comes to an abrupt end. With my back to the avenues, tarred roads, street lights, brick houses with individually enclosed yards, I begin the demarcating climb. The ancient white hill, God-made, watches the man-made tarred road, the broad black belt, at its feet. Like a sentinel, the scrub-dotted hill stands silently surveying all around it. Progress this side along the banks of Boundary Road and on the other side, deliberate and designed retardation. (TCC, 38).

She also presents us with characters who have influenced her: “Church Women Concerned was the brainchild of Shirley Turner, a white woman whose humanity somehow transcended that liability. Like most of the women I was to encounter in this group, Shirley had been groping for another way, a better way, different from the country’s traditional way of life’ “ (FG, 123).

At the same time Magona also protects some people and hides their name on purpose for fear of interfering in some way in their lives:

One of the three young men in this group, a gentle person soft-spoken and kindly disposed, was even handsome as well. He tutored the maths classes, and was reputed to be a whiz at it.

Mbulelo (not his real name) had once entertained dreams of going to Wentworth Medical School. For reasons I never got to know, this dream he had had to put on hold, or, who knows,

relinquish. I know, though, he was raised by a single parent- the mother. And had a twin brother.

I had no idea where Mbulelo's twin brother was or what he was doing. Townships families tend to exhibit such diversity in character it is sometimes prudent to make no unnecessary inquiries about the relatives of those with whom fate has, for this or that reason, temporarily joined you (TCC, 103).

5- **Realist discourse** is seen as **redundant and ostentatious** because of the need to use copious details to favour the reality effect.

Repetition, also a feature of oral discourse, is used for instance in the scene where she defines hurt:

[h]urt was poor. Hurt was hungry. Hurt was unemployment. Hurt was being denied the right to be in a particular urban area. Hurt was illness with no money for a doctor's visit. Hurt was losing all your worldly belongings in a tin-shack fire. Hurt was a mother carrying the dead body of her baby on her own back, steeling herself not even to whimper because doing so might lead to detection and then she would not be allowed onto the bus that would take her back to the village she had left that morning, hoping against hope that the white doctor in town would be able to save her baby. [...] Hurt, to me, was being told, by billboards announcing a coming theatre attraction:

'No person under 19! No Dogs, and no Bantu!'

The Bantu was me and all African people.

Hurt was a white train-conductor asking [...]

'What does this thing want here?'

The thing was me(...). Hurt! What did white people know about it? They had choice. This one right denied me all my life was theirs by virtue of their skin (FG,126-127).

Her repetition is to make clear to us what black people endured. Although she does not use images, drawings or photographs, through her full of detail descriptions we can “see” what was happening or, in this case what they had to stand everyday:

I was struck by the wholeness of women who, I knew, would be transformed, the minute they opened the gates of the houses where they toiled. From the alert, vivacious, knowledgeable, interesting people they were on the buses, they would change to mute, zombie-like figures who did not dare have an idea, opinion, or independent thought about anything, anything at all. (TCC, 145).

6- The sixth feature shown by Hamon is the use of **characters/guarantors** (sometimes fictive personas) who personify **scientific knowledge** in certain areas.

Magona also chooses authority characters to transmit information and make it more acceptable. However, we never actually “hear” them speak. We are informed of such technical details through: “Psychologists call my kind of response habituation. Habituation: familiarity that comes with frequent exposure or repetition; becoming accustomed to what was once staggering, bewildering or upsetting” (FG, 89-90).

The same situation happens with doctors that will also help us understand her first pregnancy problems: “With one hand cupped and

the other rolled into a fist, the teacher-doctor demonstrated to the group a manoeuvre they were going to try. Describing, with the two hands thus held, something like a ball and socket joint, he showed them how, by easing the lubricated ball out of the socket at an angle, it was sometimes possible to deliver ‘disproportionate’ cases naturally” (TCC, 112). We are only faced with a specialist’s words through a letter from Magona’s lawyer, but he does not use technical vocabulary. The only thing he is able to do is to depress Magona (see FG, 118). When speaking about domestic work, she herself living day in day out with women who shared this kind of oppression, she gives a common authority for her knowledge: “What I heard, on the buses to and from the black townships – where one hears and one learns – is as valid as any data based on scientific probings; only, much more exciting, much more alive!” (TCC, 139).

Magona also uses a strategically fictive person to present her autobiographical works. This person does not exist as she imagines herself in the future as a great-grandmother telling her grandchildren the story of her life.

7- The Realist text is marked by **redundancy of information and the foreseeability of contents.**

We have redundancy of information when she refers to the difference of the amount spent on African and white children in school. She starts in *To My Children’s Children*:

“At that time the government subsidized education to the tune of R480 for a white child and R28 for an African child. It has not burdened the African child with compulsory education” (TCC, 99), then in *Forced to Grow*:

“ It has been said all along that education of the African child was appallingly inferior to that of the white child. Any fool could figure that out. Not much could be bought for twenty-eight

rand a year- the amount the government gave for the education of an African child. The same government had no qualms in lavishing four hundred and eighty rand each year on the education of one white child” (FG, 149),

and once more:

“ what education, never mind a ‘good one, can be had with the ratio 480:280:28? That was government spending in rands on South African children per annum in order White, Coloured, African” (FG, 188).

Magona did not forget she had already mentioned the amount spent on education but what she wishes us to understand is that the difference was so abysmal that the unfairness of the system should not be forgotten. The White child received more than seventeen times than a coloured child and started school three years earlier, which is to say that any coloured child who could learn anything out of these conditions along with overcrowded classes had to be good “ with even the potential for ‘great’ prefixing it (her stubborn sense of her own worth)” (FG, 21).

The foreseeability of contents is not only attained by the redundancy of information but also by her ironies. For instance when she uses colours to describe the years (1967-yellow; see FG,1; 1984-pink and later blood red; see FG, 226) we also learn, before she tells us what happened, that the events of that year will be good or bad.

Characters will be reduced to their professional activities or social role. Most characters who interact with Magona are described within their socio-professional environment. There are the unemployed women - “mothers” who help Magona to take care of her children; the teachers who help her to regain work in a school or a university student who help her to settle down in New York city when she goes to Columbia University.

8- The narrator of Realist texts speaks with authority as **the story happened to him or her or was entrusted to them by an expert on the subject**. This is usually presented in the opening scenes.

The delineation of objectives right from the beginning is included in Magona's justification of her autobiographical work: she wanted to tell her grandchildren who they were, where they had come from and to register her life so that they could understand who they were. Notwithstanding this, she sometimes forgets she is speaking to them. Although it seems obvious in an autobiography we must also remember she is speaking about things that truly happened in her life. She can easily talk about the teaching career as she was a teacher for several years and taught different standards. In relation to domestic work the same situation applies as she worked in the job for four years and in different families. Both of these situations give her substantial, personal and professional knowledge of what she is talking about.

9- Realist discourse will try to position the **reader and author as absent** and **avoid characteristics of hesitation, irony or speculative discourse** like quotation marks, italics, emphases, expressions of love and tenderness or even expressions such as "one might think" or "one would think" - as Hamon puts it.

In contradistinction to Realists Magona is not ashamed to demonstrate hesitation and the tricks of memory we have already seen. Irony is constant, as has already been stressed, and in her discourse both reader and author are present. On one hand these are autobiographical works, and thus there is a discourse based on the first person singular, while on the other we cannot forget that both *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* are written as if an oral story was being told, so direct interrogations to her grandchildren are made, rhetorical questions to keep our interest alive and direct reflections about her past are asked.

10- The hero is a problem for Realist authors as centering a text around a character may introduce subjectivity. To avoid it there may happen a **constant change of the point of view**. The hero will be neglected when he/she is no longer needed to present, introduce or authenticate the discourse.

Also referred to before is the change of focaliser. When Magona wants she sees happenings through the eyes of the child Magona but at other times she turns to the adult Magona who can, now, analyse things more appropriately. She even makes judgements about her own behaviour, which is also natural as she has learned from her own mistakes: One example being: “I was young and exceedingly foolish” (FG, 17). The hero is clear in these works as it can only be Magona. She was successful for various reasons: She was able to survive, on her own, with three children, give them and herself an education, so that their future would be better. Although the South African regime imposed very strict restrictions on her life, she was able to go abroad to study and improve herself and she was even able to overcome her own tradition as she became a writer, a woman writer which at the time was not all that usual: “ I did not know I could write. I did not know anyone like me who did. Even the Xhosa writers I knew of were much older, all men “ (FG, 184)

11- The eleventh characteristic is the **use of technical, scientific, technological and historical discourse to avoid ambiguity and achieve the transparency of language**.

The use of precise vocabulary makes Magona include a quotation from a dictionary, as she is not able to translate it from Xhosa into any of the other three languages she speaks: “*idikazi* which, according to the Reverend Robert Godfrey’s A Kaffir-English Dictionary (printed in 1918) refers to ‘an unmarried female’. And, the dictionary further enlightens us, this is ‘a term of reproach to all women who are husbandless’. And that, I certainly was” (FG, 1. Italics in the text). She

employs in her discourse historical, technical and scientific knowledge (as seen above) to give her work authenticity.

The translations from her mother tongue to English are also a constant, as in, for instance “lintsomi” meaning the fairy tales of amaXhosa, riddles (TCC, 13), even songs (TCC, 41), or speeches (TCC, 69-70), or everyday vocabulary like “Niyayifun’ireyi?” meaning “do you want a ride?” (TCC, 68). Another technique Sindiwe also makes use of is the use of technical vocabulary which, unlike with some Realist texts, does not make it hard to understand her message because she is careful and translates what it means. Throughout her books it is usual to find sentences: “We didn’t even call him ‘tata’ (father). He was called ‘Bhuti Wasekapa’ (older brother from Cape Town), by mother’s siblings, too young to use the customary ‘sibali’ (brother-in-law)”.

Ironical is the situation created when a fish and chips shop proprietor tries to humiliate Magona and ends up by being humiliated himself as he calls a boy employee to serve her and the boy replies “Ungam hoyi wena, Sisi. Sisibhanxa esi” – “Don’t you mind him, Sisi. This here is a fool” (FG, 112). Given that the owner does not understand Xhosa they are able to communicate without the interference of the oppressor. Here the usage of technical vocabulary does not serve the purpose of keeping hidden information from the reader but to expose a situation that could often happen if most people had the dignity this young man showed and to demonstrate the possibility of small acts of dignity and resistance that one’s own culture could confer.

12- The Realist discourse looks for what it feels is the essence instead of the appearance, this is the reason why it **avoids including invisible or mysterious beings as well as false or sexually ambiguous characters.**

We never feel Magona is avoiding including sensitive or tabu topics. On the contrary, she is very straightforward and relates how in

the USA people found it awkward for two women to walk holding hands:

'No, Sindiwe, here women don't hold hands.' I had pushed Erlin to verbal explanation. She had been telling me in so many subtle ways not to hold hands with her or, worse, put my arm around her waist as we walked up and down Broadway" [...] 'People will think we are lesbians' (FG, 205).

She continues:

'Well, well, well! We certainly didn't want that, did we? From then on, each time I touched Erlin or, as I met and got to know more people, another woman, my hand would recoil as if it had found itself clasping a live cobra. However, until I left Columbia University and the City of New York, I still found that on occasion I'd forget myself and take another woman's hand in mine. Old habits die hard" (FG, 205-206).

While a child, she tells us about a mysterious being which inhabits the river in her memory. This is also a common tale in Portugal to keep children away from rivers or artesian wells:

We could be 'called into' (*sibizelwe*) the river by Mamlambo, the River Woman whose dangerous beauty drew people into the depth of her magnetic eyes, sucked them into the world deep under the river, where she made her home (TCC, 9. Italics in the text).

13- The Realist text is always in a hurry to achieve its ends rapidly and to fulfil the reader's expectations. The hurriedness of the text is not too apparent here although some summaries of her life are highly succinct, but in autobiography that is possible as memory does not

retain every detail of one's life. Nevertheless ellipsis of information sometimes happens as we have already seen.

14- Magona's text is not built in the form of dichotomies as it was built in chronological order, but her life is built with a certain sense of progress, successes and then mistakes, errors. For instance, she was able to pass all her chosen four subjects in the Matric examinations. However, she became jobless because she was a married woman. Magona sums up her life: "Like the seasons of the year, life was depicted full of cause and effect, predictability and order; connectedness and oneness" (TCC, 6).

15- The enumeration of facts is one of the artefacts used by Realists and Magona uses it when explaining how she escaped total destitution with the help of the butcher who sold her sheep heads on credit. She explains step by step how she prepared those sheep heads:

1. Rinse sheep head in cold water, thoroughly, until there is no trace of blood on wool.

2. Let most of the water run off by pressing hands in downward motion from mouth area towards base or severed end.

3. Put head in airy, sunny place for at least half an hour to allow wool to dry. Outside is best for this, but beware of dogs. Dogs have an underdeveloped sense of social responsibility and proprietorship.

4. Make a log fire.

5. Place head on flame, less than five minutes each time, to singe wool.

6. Remove and using old table knife and plucking, scraping movements, remove burnt wool.

7. Repeat 5 and 6, exposing different areas to flame until only stubble remains.

8. Using red-hot flat-iron rods and ironing movements, go over stubble until surface is smooth to touch; use cylindrical rods for all apertures.

9. Immerse in almost boiling water and, using pot-scraper, scrub clean (TCC, 170-171).

Afterwards she teaches us point by point how to cook them: “1.Take a very sharp knife and describe a line down the centre of the head, from crown, down the bridge, to the lower lip[...] 6.Cool” (TCC, 171).

Besides these fifteen elements Magona uses other strategies that help us to understanding her truth and her life. For instance:

She uses swearing to make us believe that her parents never spent a penny on toys despite the fact that the children played and were happy: “Although I can swear by all that is sacred that not a penny was ever spent on a toy by my family, we children were never at a loss as to what to do with ourselves.” (TCC, 24).

The contradictions of her own culture also add a realistic aura for instance: “In the African tradition life is celebrated and children are treasured. It is ironic that women, the bearers of these national treasures, are at one and the same time praised for bringing forth babies and devalued for that very act” (FG, 20) and “Our lives are filled with such contradictions. We go to church. We go to the witchdoctor. We go to the doctor. We send our children to school. We believe they can be made to fail their examinations as a result of bewitching by an enemy” (FG, 67).

She reflects upon herself as a human being: “Maybe I am not as shy as I believe I am” (FG, 107), “I learned that day that although another may sympathise when I bleed, the tears can only be mine” (FG, 69) or “My mother is a witchdoctor.’ I certainly have come a long way from the

false sense of shame I used to harbour. I am proud of Mother, for she has travelled very far in her life's journey" (FG, 76).

She explains expressions like "Dead wearing a hat" which meant "the husband no longer performs those duties usually associated with that role – functions such as those of provider, protector, lover and father. He is dead in the role of family head. However, as he is 'wearing a hat', he is walking around physically appearing alive" (TCC, 167).

It is through all of the above characteristics that Magona reveals herself and her inner feelings. In this way she is able to demonstrate her anger, her internal conflicts but also her dignity, her way out of destitution and her concern for other women.

Conclusion

In the same way that Magona says "[s]ometimes I actually kid myself that I plan my life. [...] I know that nothing is further from the truth"(FG, 192), I also thought at the beginning of this work that everything was planned and it would easily be followed. Nevertheless it gained a life of its own and showed me new paths that had to be pursued. Mainly because of this reason many things have been left out that would also be interesting, namely the comparison of her work and especially sensations as a domestic worker while writing her autobiography and her fiction. The role of mother in these autobiographical works and in *Mother to Mother* would also be absorbing, although Meg Samuelson has already given the first step towards this study in an article quoted in this work.

There are many aspects in which Realism and autobiography touch, principally of course in the truth telling as main objective and the use of language which is, as we have seen, always subjective and which only on the surface goes against Realist and autobiographical principles.

The truth and only the truth is essential to Realism and autobiography although it is almost impossible to attain. To tell or say the truth is always subjective. Men or women may see things differently, a child analyses them in a different perspective from an adult. So, we have the notion of what I call personal truth. As we have seen before bell hooks could have sworn that an incident of her past which was engraved in her memory was true and after consulting her mother she realised that it apparently never happened. It was the child Gloria (bell hooks) who through her fears, wishes, dreams confused what was real or rather with time it was neglected and in the present memory, itself, assumed the fact as if it really had happened. Magona has probably, sometimes, felt this difficulty and uses both the vision of the child and the adult Magona (while speaking of her childhood events). The authenticity of her feelings as a child or while dating

Luthando are now (as an adult) criticised for being blind, naive or innocent.

But it is not only memory that tricks us, words themselves are slippery. They have a life of their own, a meaning that has history and at the same time, they gain new meanings, contributing to the fact that using words is subjective, *they* are subjective. This explains the contradiction of realists making us believe their work flowed in unmediated fashion. Magona also says her autobiography is just straightforward as if she had written it without corrections. Their suggestion of the naturalness of their writing is contrary to what most of them felt in the process of writing itself. As we have seen, Flaubert confesses to a friend the atrocious task of writing everyday and common events (like tying one's shoes or opening the door) in an appealing manner. Magona never confesses this difficulty probably because her work is based on oral tradition, she acts as if she is telling a story to her grandchildren, although she, most of the time forgets this context and almost only at the end of the two volumes of autobiography does she remember them and address them directly.(see TCC, 23 and 183; FG,231-232).

As Realists and autobiographers realised the absolute truth was a myth they decided on other objectives instead of the truth; realists started using the notion of *vraisemblance*, that is, the closest version possible to truth, but which might contain aspects which from some angles are less truthful. For autobiographers what became important was what bell hooks call “the true state of mind and spirit of the moment”¹⁵⁶. This new notion of dealing with the problems of autobiography might be less accurate but it is extremely important because in some contexts what is more important than facts is that the story keeps on being told. In fact what is more important is the event, the happening of the coming into voice not what has provoked or led to it. This also occurs with Magona. She did not know how or who gave her the money but what was really important for her, at that moment,

was that she was able to buy her daughter her very first Christmas dress. This recognition that one's mind does not register happenings forever made Sindiwe Magona write her autobiographies so that her history and the history of the Xhosa would not be forgotten. Gareth Griffiths in "The Myth of Authenticity", claims that:

It is clearly crucial to resistance that the 'story' of the Indian continues to be told. It is only through such counter-narratives that alter/native views can be put. (...) That is to say the fundamental systemic discourse through which the world is represented, analogous to other indigenous stories such as that of the various dreamings of the Australian Aboriginal peoples. (...) That the conquerors in fact continue to fear the 'story' of the indigene and seek to silence it is graphically and horrifically illustrated by their favored torture of cutting out the tongues of the Indians and then, subsequent to this act, forcing them to 'speak'¹⁵⁷.

Given that many features of AmaXhosa culture (an oral based culture) were disappearing mainly because of the Apartheid system—"the government's influx control policy, a policy aimed at keeping Africans away from urban areas of South Africa. A policy that succeeded in wrecking African families" (TCC, 33), Magona thought she had the duty to tell future generations what it was like in her time.

Laura Marcus, in her *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory. Criticism. Practice* quotes Gusdorf's description of autobiography as being "a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it"¹⁵⁸. There is a "truth" in the retelling of the experience, or in a "a second reading", as Gusdorf puts it, that is not the same as the "truth" felt at the immediate moment of the happening since the writer has had time to meditate and

rethink the events that he/she chooses to write about, but the suggestion that it is “truer than the first”, as suggested by Gusdorf, is doubtful. One looks back on past events with a different perspective and this may imply certain changes in the “truth” – and so the first reading of experience may be considered more immediate as the writer would be telling the events or experience without lengthy reflection on the matter, supposedly registering events and feelings at the time as they actually happened. This is, of course, almost impossible as it implies constantly putting down things as they happen. Gusdorf concludes that “the passage from immediate experience to consciousness in memory, which affects a sort of repetition of that experience, also serves to modify its significance” (158). This alteration in how one can see an event is felt by Magona while writing as she claims she can see clearer when registering events later: “I did not recognise until now as I write that...” (FG, 58). Writing obliges her to contemplate her life more deeply and as a consequence she is able to understand better the happenings of her life.

Throughout this work we have seen that Magona’s objective was to tell the truth: “Not embellished, not changed, just straight forward” (...) “And that’s the naked truth”¹⁵⁹. Moreover she wishes to “write about (her) life, an ordinary life”¹⁶⁰, which was also one of the first aims of Realists. In the same interview she says there are very erudite books by experts written on Apartheid but she wishes to persuade people about her truth as she “(is) not an expert; (she is) just someone who lived Apartheid”¹⁶¹ and who else is better to write about a situation than those who have lived it? Those who felt on their own skin the racism, discrimination and danger? Therefore she is more likely to be taken as truthful than any other person who has not lived the situation. Even in Realist fictional discourse this would also happen – an eyewitness or somebody who would have been involved in the situation would supposedly present the facts.

Pamela Ryan affirms that “In her autobiography Magona is determinedly optimistic” ¹⁶²and this can be explained by the fact that the autobiographer always knows where her/his story will end and Magona knows her story is a happy one, she is conscious of that. She knows that it was her studies and her husband leaving her that made it possible for her to have a better life and that job opportunity in New York. But there are also less positive aspects in her work, one of the most striking being the one where she defines hurt .

We can also say she intended to change people’s minds, to have a didactic function. Magona hopes people will recognise their difficulties in her life and that they must work hard to overcome them. She presents herself as a self-made person as it was largely through her own effort that she improved herself. Her success is even greater as she not only succeeded but she also was able to control the oppressor’s language and write about her own people in English “[w]riting was no less a myth to me than Icarus and his attempt to reach the sun” (FG, 184), and the AmaXhosa had not been a writing people.

She does not define herself as a feminist but she hopes she can show the world how black women in South Africa strive:

Well, the Black woman is unfortunately, for better or for worse, at the bottom of the rung. It doesn’t matter what you’re looking at, (...), because she’s a female, she’s lesser human being. But because she’s black, she’s also a lesser human being. (...) She’s usually at the bottom, taking orders from everybody else.(...) I had a situation where, despite having published two or three books, my supervisor here at the UN said I couldn’t write. He said I used the gerund too often. But of course this was not about writing; this was about power¹⁶³.

The relation to power in Magona's work is sometimes contradictory. Right from the beginning we understand she wishes to be her brother 'Jongi', probably because of his power and influence over their group of friends. After having children and being deserted by her husband she claims she was a father to them. Here she assumes that role. As I have explained before, for economic reasons she was obliged to perform this function, although within the family there was no obligation for her to behave in what she presumed was a masculine fashion.

Throughout *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* she gives us clues about her own intimate objective: she wishes to be something better to regain her parents' trust and admiration again. Underneath these reflections are the fact that she believes she was a woman of dubious repute, she considers herself inferior for not having obeyed the traditional customs, for having offended her parents and above all for having three children she did not plan. She inflicted on her children that kind of strict discipline which included corporal punishment because she wanted to prove to society, herself and mainly to her parents that she could raise well-behaved children who would not put themselves in jeopardy as she had done and she made sure they would never embarrass her the way she has done her parents. Before dying, her father feels proud of her once more so for Magona one of her aims is achieved. Her mother's recognition is not so easy to acquire.

Even though her father was a man who spoke very little to his children and who punished them strictly, it was her mother's sense of betrayal that hit Magona more. We must not forget

[t]hat the mother is the constant feature, that which holds the family together while shiftless fathers drift through it"¹⁶⁴. Many women were mothers to Magona "it has been my luck that I have found

helping hands along the way as I journeyed forth. People have given me encouragement when my spirits flagged, have bandaged me when I bled, fed me when hungry, shown me the way when I had strayed, held up the mirror so I could see myself. These people, all of them, irrespective of race, sex or class, I call my mothers. Some have even been younger than I am. But I call all of them my mothers, for they have helped me become (FG, 140).

But none of these women were Mother. Motherhood is then, for her, an institution as well as an individual and she needs acceptance from both. Instead of embarrassing her parents with her marriage she feels she has been disloyal to all Xhosa people: “the maternal voice maintains the family, the community”¹⁶⁵ – as Meg Samuelson puts it. To regain their faith in her she goes through much adversity but after so much suffering and after spending some time in New York studying she:

returned home triumphant. I was a graduate of an Ivy League College in the United States. I had a master’s degree. I had a job offer. Life looked good (FG, 219).

But this is not all, she was able to raise three children, alone, and give them the means for them to study and have a degree. Besides these proofs of being a deserving daughter she goes further and dedicates her second volume of autobiography *Forced to Grow* to Mother. To reinforce this idea of needing to prove she was worth her mother’s trust she says: [w]hat is good fortune, extreme good fortune, if it touches no-one else but oneself? I brought both Mother and Thembeke to my graduation in May” (FG, 217).

Magona confessed that “[a]ny praise from mother is high praise indeed. Mother, certainly to judge from the words that frequently spew from her mouth, lives by the words from a hymn that go ‘ugqobhoko olululo asinto ixelwa ngomlomo. Lubonwa nqezenzo’- which loosely translates: True faith is not something announced by words. It is seen through actions” (FG, 30-31). We do not know if Magona’s mother ever told her she was proud of her again, nevertheless we are informed that she wept copiously on Magona’s graduation day because she was overjoyed.

All through her life, Magona tried to put Mother’s words into action which is why after having achieved her goal she no longer needs to be in a country where she can only see the “lies, the myths, the distortion, the humiliation” (FG, 218) so, she decides to go back to New York with her children:

Leaving the country itself. Leaving friends. I wanted to go. I wanted to stay. I couldn’t understand why everything had to be so complicated [...]. The severance of the umbilical cord announces the first breath drawn, and this scene is repeated many a time in the human drama we call life. Repeated, for without separation, without this affirmation of being separate, we would stifle each other, wither and be of no account, like chaff sent hither and thither by the blowing of the wind (FG, 230).

Georges Gusdorf explains that “autobiography is almost a final gesture, written at the close of a life”¹⁶⁶ especially because he associates to autobiography with his theme of existential anxiety. Nevertheless, Magona’s autobiography was not written almost at the end of her life but it attempted to represent the end of a chapter in her

life. A chapter full of hard work and pain, of racism and condemnation especially on account of the colour of her skin. As we have seen in South Africa's Apartheid system being black was a synonym of servitude and inferiority. As Muriel, a character in Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at the Metropolitan* explains "the colour of your skin alone condemns you to a position of eternal servitude from which you can never escape"¹⁶⁷. Fortunately Magona was successful in overcoming this inferior social status but we are aware that she also felt that just the fact of being white opened many doors that would be closed for African people. Nevertheless this reflection on and awareness of her past helped her to triumph over her past scars. As bell hooks confirms, the act of writing and [r]emembering was part of a cycle of reunion, a joining of fragments, "the bits and pieces of my heart" that the narrative made whole again"¹⁶⁸. As we have seen above, writing for Magona brought her the healing she required to be able to survive. It seems that the act of writing autobiography set her free as she was obliged to reflect upon her actions and her life and culture and that brought a "reconciliation with self"¹⁶⁹ (as Roy Pascal has it) which allowed her to regain trust in herself and keep on writing in a different area - fiction, but still feeling the need to expose the humiliation and unfairness of the Apartheid system.

End Notes

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³ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory. Criticism. Practice*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 163.

⁴ Laura Marcus, p. 3.

⁵ Margaret J. Daymond, "Class in the Discourses of Sindiwe Magona's Autobiography and Fiction" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 21, Number 4 Durban: University of Natal, December 1995, p.564.

⁶ Sindiwe Magona, 'In Your Own Words' in *International Women's Writing Guild*.

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⁷ Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography" in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, ed. *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 174

⁸ Liz Stanley *The auto/biographical I*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992, pp. 242-243

⁹ Laura Marcus, p.161.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.5.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 229.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 160.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.147-154

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁰ Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children's Children: An Autobiography*, London, The Women's Press, 1991, preface. Henceforth indicated in parenthesis with the abbreviation TCC followed by page number.

²¹ Sindiwe Magona, *Forced to Grow*, London, The Women's Press, 1992, p. 100. Henceforth indicated in parenthesis with the abbreviation FG followed by page number.

²² F.W. J. Hemmings, "The Realist Novel: The European Context" in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck (Ed), *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, London and Detroit, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 555-556.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 557.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 559.

²⁵ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, "Realism and the English Novel" in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck (Ed), *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, London and Detroit, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 566.

²⁶ Lilian R. Furst, *Realism*, New York, Longman, 1992, p. 1.

²⁷ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, p. 565.

²⁸ Damian Grant, *Realism: The Critical Idiom*, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1974, p. 2.

²⁹ Lilian R. Furst, p. 12.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 9.

³¹ Damian Grant, p. 4.

³² (Letter to Louise Colet, 12 September 1853, 429. Italics in the original text), "Flaubert on Writing *Madame Bovary*" in Lilian R. Furst, p. 40.

³³ "Flaubert on Writing *Madame Bovary*" in Lilian R. Furst, p. 40.

³⁴ Lilian R. Furst, p. 14.

³⁵ "Balzac Addresses the Reader about Truth" in Lilian R. Furst, p. 30.

³⁶ "Duranty on the Principles of Realism" in Lilian R. Furst, p. 31.

³⁷ Lilian R. Furst, p. 3.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴² Lilian R. Furst, "Maupassant on Realism as 'Illusionism'", p. 47.

⁴³ "Philippe Hamon on the Major Features of Realist Discourse" in Lilian R. Furst, p. 166-185.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 168-169.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 177.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp.180-181.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.169.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.185.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶⁵ Damian Grant, p. 55.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Sara Mills, "Authentic Realism" in *Feminists Reading* by Sara Mills, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spauull and Elaine Millard , Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf,1989, p. 55.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.61.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.62.

⁷¹ Charles T. Davies and Henry Louis Gates, Jr, *The Slaves' Narratives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. xiii.

⁷² Crispin Sartwell, "Truth and Concealment in Slave Narratives" in *Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography & White Identity*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 31.

⁷³ An example of this economicist perspective can be found in "Crushed Geraniums: Juan Francisco Manzano and the Language of Slavery" in *The Slaves' Narratives*, p.199/202.

⁷⁴ William L. Andrews, p. 79.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 82/83.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁷ Charles T. Davies and Henry Louis Gates, Jr, p. 246.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. xxvi

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸⁰ Rebecca Chalmers Barton, *Witnesses for Freedom*, New York, Harper,1948, p. xii

⁸¹ Joanne M. Braxton "Crusader for Justice: Ida B. Wells" in *African, American Autobiography*, p. 90.

⁸² Quoted by Albert E. Stone "Patterns in Recent Black Autobiography" in William L. Andrews, *African American Autobiography*, p. 175.

⁸³ William L. Andrews, p. 184.

⁸⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and edited by H. M. Parshley, London, Everyman's Library,1993, p. 710.

⁸⁵ Charles T. Davies and Henry Louis Gates, Jr, p. 151.

⁸⁶ William L. Andrews, p. 83.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 86.

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